

**Exploring Teachers' Insights into Their Professional Growth and other Experiences in Diverse
Classrooms in Alberta**

by

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Abstract

Recent rapid changes in immigration intake have impacted education in Canada, particularly in Alberta. As a result of these changes, the student demographic has grown increasingly more diverse. The Edmonton Public School Board, for example, noticed a significant growth in the English Language Learner (ELL) student population, more than doubling the number of this particular group of students in recent years. Some comparative educational rankings such as the much publicized Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) suggests some decline in the overall performance of Canadian students. These school performance indicators are closely watched by concerned parents and stakeholders. These factors combined have contributed to put pressure on school administrators and teachers, and triggered educational reforms seeking to meet the complex needs of the increasingly diverse student population through advocating for a greater degree of accountability from schools. This study explores the perceptions of the experiences of four high school English language arts teachers in a major city in Alberta, who are diverse in background and in their perceptions lived experiences, on how education is responding to the current increased diversity in the classrooms and schools, and how these teachers see their professional growth in the context of this diversity. It is a multiple case study of each of these four teachers and their insights into the present situation of diversity in their classrooms and schools. As I was unable to see clearly an a priori theoretical framework for this work as my hoped for approaches through the work of Freire and the German/American neo-Marxist critical theorists did not resonate either with my own experience or that of the four teachers who offered their insight, I approached this task as one of constructing a possible theoretical account of the results via a grounded theory approach. The one theory that clearly did arise out of the views of the four teachers is that there is inadequate representation of the views of practicing teachers informing educational policy in Alberta at the present time.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Daniela D'arc Fontenele Tereshchuk. This research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Ethics Board, Project Name "Exploring Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions into Professional Growth in Diverse Classrooms in Alberta", No. Pro00051465, January 8th, 2015.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to
Dr. William Ian Shirran Winchester
for being an inspiration to young scholars and an asset to education.

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My educational endeavours would not have been possible without the love and support of my husband Sergiy, this dissertation is as much his as it is mine. To my 'petit prince' Andrew for teaching me to see the world through the eyes of a child. To my mom Rita who taught me "lâche pas la patate" and my dad Francisco for his support. I owe special thanks to many of my good friends, especially Faith, Paul, Cecile, Harry, Hema, and many others who supported me. A special thanks to the teachers who participated in this study for their precious time, for sharing their teaching experiences, perspectives and mostly importantly for trusting me with their stories.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This study aims to explore the perceptions of the experiences of four Alberta high school teachers with respect to professional growth in the context of diversity in the classrooms in Alberta. My intention is to illustrate how diversity has affected education from these four teachers' perspectives.

Canada has been a diverse society even before many people immigrated into Canada to join the Indigenous Nations. The Indigenous Nations themselves were already comprised of many different tribes with different traditions and languages already living in the region that is now Canada prior to the arrival of the first European settlers (Palmer, 1982). One might have thought that the creation of reserves for the Indigenous First Nations might have created a unified indigenous culture and perhaps led to a unified language. But that was very far from the truth, as Drees (2002) explains "In Alberta, reserve communities are largely located in isolated parts of the province, away from large centers. Historically, their isolation discouraged any collective identity or political movements as communication between communities were difficult" (p. 34). That is to say, the First Nations were formed by diverse groups of people, for example, in the south part of Alberta, we find tribes such as the Blood (Kanai), Blackfoot (Siksika), Sarcee (Tsuu T'ina) and Stony (Nakoda). However, when these tribes started to live on reserves, these were located far apart creating isolation among the different Indigenous tribes, which might have prevented much cultural or political association among these diverse native peoples (Drees, 2002).

Historically, McLeod (1975) suggests that the original settlers to Alberta were initially largely drawn from British and French stock and soon followed by a wide variety of peoples from Scandinavia, Ukraine, Germany and other European nations after Alberta became a

province carved out of the North West Territories (along with Saskatchewan) in 1905. However, in more recent years, Canada including Alberta has experienced an accentuated increase in its immigrant population, becoming much more complex in many aspects such as culture and socio-economic features as well as many other diversity related issues encountered, especially, in education (Campbell, 2017; Hamm, 2015; Mason & Schroeder, 2010). At the end of the Second World War, Alberta for example, had a population of just over a million people (Alberta Population Estimates, 2018). The Alberta population in 2018 has now reached over 4 million people, many of whom are not drawn from the earlier groups like the French, the British, the Scandinavians, the Germans or the Ukrainians (Statistics Canada, 2018). Indeed, they are now drawn widely from other non-European continents including Asia generally, Africa as well as South and Central America (Statistics Canada, 2018).

Consequently, the issue of diversity has grown in importance in the light of these recent changes in immigration, which has impacted the student demographic. In the last 10 years, the student clientele has significantly become more noticeably diverse. This has challenged public education to adapt educational policies and pedagogical practices to meet the needs of a complex student body, particularly, in Alberta (Edmonton Public Schools report, 2014).

Diversity in education has become the focus of debates and the centre of a variety of narratives emerging from different understandings of what diversity means. Winchester (2002) suggests that diversity is complex and often not just about 'what is taught or what is learned'. For instance, contemporary American Marxists might advocate for an 'egalitarian' education. The challenge with the concept of an egalitarian education is that it might imply finding 'the right education model' that would suit everyone. Education itself has a complex and diverse nature as students have different learning needs and schools have pluralistic teaching contexts, which

makes it both unfair and impossible to singularly define what is 'the best education' for everyone.

Diversity is encouraged and popularly supported in many countries, in our own day as one sees different forms of educational programs being offered in the supposedly 'egalitarian' Western societies such as Norway, Sweden, Denmark and Finland. In Canada, for example, parents may choose to enroll their child in different programs of choice such as a Catholic educational program, a specific language immersion program, traditional schools or many other special programs offered, often, publicly funded. In these programs, Winchester (2002) argues that the important focus is "what is taught and often how it is taught" (p. 2), leaning towards unified standardization of 'what is taught' in order to deliver the necessary expected teaching outcomes, but at the same time, offering much non-standard fair: Special programs for the scientifically inclined, special languages such as German, Spanish, Hebrew or Ukrainian, an emphasis on sports, and so on. On the other hand, parents might also think that their children would benefit from attending 'public schools' with a more general educational program, which might enforce a general understanding of diversity, making it important to expose learners to a variety of topics and perspectives of learning.

As the diverse Canadian population steadily grows, professionals such as teachers, doctors, lawyers and many others increasingly regard understanding diversity as an essential part of the set of skills and abilities key to their success professionally (Briscoe & Pollock, 2017; Winchester, 2002). Although some studies have addressed some of the complex challenges in education due to the increasing diversity in the classrooms, insufficient attention has been paid to the perspectives and experiences of Alberta teachers on the issue of diversity and their preparation to teach well in the new context (Briscoe & Pollock, 2017; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012; Watt & Roessingh, 1994). This study seeks to explore this under-researched area of

education.

In order to understand how teachers perceive their professional growth in the context of diversity, this study explores the perceptions of experiences of four English language arts high school educators teaching in the context of contemporary diverse classrooms in Alberta. The study looks into the responses of these four teachers to the following open-ended questions: What are the perceptions of high school teachers with respect to their experiences of the increasing diversity in their classrooms and schools in Alberta? How are the official attempts by the Ministry of Education responding to this increasing diversity in Alberta classrooms and schools as perceived by the teachers themselves? (Diversity of origin of students, teachers and other kinds of diversity), and how do high school teachers presently manage their own professional growth in the context of both this increasing diversity and the increasing provincial attempts responding to this in order to manage such diversity?

This study is a multiple case study, which assumes the truth of a constructivist picture of knowledge deriving initially from Jean Piaget and framed around grounded theory (Creswell, 2013). The study benefited from a constructive grounded theoretical approach, which is flexible and the main focus is the data emerging from the participants in the multiple case study (Charmaz, 2006; Creswell, 2013; Padula & Miller, 1999). In terms of methodology, I used a qualitative approach to tell the unique stories of these four high school teachers. The data were collected through a preliminary background questionnaire, emailed to these teachers after they signed their consent to participate in the study. Next, the four participants were interviewed individually by the researcher using an open-ended set of questions, and finally, the teachers and the researcher participated in a two and half-hour long focus group meeting. The semi-structured questions used during the focus group meeting were similar to or overlapped the ones used for

the individual interviews. The individual interviews and the focus group meeting were audio recorded and later transcribed, and organized into themes, which emerged from the data.

The rationale for this study comes out of the new and complex reality in the classrooms in Alberta as our student population has grown increasingly diverse. This increasingly diverse student population in Canada and, in this case specifically in Alberta, has caught education to a certain extent by surprise and unprepared (Falkenberg, Goodnough, & MacDonald, 2014; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). Teachers are struggling to make sense of such diversity without proper educational and professional support (Bautista & Ortega-Ruiz, 2015; Hamm, 2015; Merryfield, 2000; Rodrigues, 2005). Teachers have pointed to a disconnection between theory and practice as well as ineffective administrative initiatives and policies addressing the challenges they face teaching in diverse classrooms (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008).

This study is significant in that it offers a glimpse of what is happening in four diverse classrooms in a major city in Alberta. It answers in a limited way who these teachers currently teaching in the Alberta classrooms are, their identities, their experiences and their needs for professional growth. It attempts to discover some of the main issues that need to be addressed in education from the perspectives of these four educators.

The role of the researcher was as of a facilitator in these teacher conversations as well as an observer. I, the researcher, am an immigrant of French-Brazilian heritage who moved to Canada about 15 years ago and speaks two other languages, in addition to English. I recently taught an introductory curriculum design course to three student cohorts at St. Mary's University in the Bachelor of Education program. I also worked for the Calgary Board of Education as an elementary and junior high school teacher in Calgary as well as at the University of Calgary as a sessional instructor in recent years.

In addition to my experience teaching in a Canadian context, I also taught in the public educational system in Brazil for 8 years as a K-12 teacher. My teaching experience also includes working with Adult literacy using a Freirian teaching method in Brazil prior to moving to Canada. In Brazil, my students were mainly of African, Indigenous and Portuguese mixed races, and came from low income families. These factors heavily impacted teaching and learning in the ill-run and ineffective public educational system in Brazil. During my Master's degree, I explored the experiences with professional growth of some of the high school teachers in Brazil (Nascimento, 2010). I learned that beginning teachers in Brazil share many similar perceived experiences with Canadian teachers. Teacher education does not always effectively prepare teachers to enter the reality in the classrooms and professional development practices rely mainly on traditional approaches such as the deemed ineffective 'One Size Fits All' model, commonly used in teacher professional development programs.

In Canada, I have worked in two different schools. The first one was a suburban middle school with a population of over 700 students. Most of these students were of Asian and Middle-eastern heritage, and only a minority of students had European roots. The school was located in a low-income area and most of the students in the school were English Language Learners. Some recently arrived with very little academic English language. The second school I worked, is located in an affluent middle-upper class neighborhood in the Calgary inner city. It is a small school with just over 200 students, and great majority of the students, teachers as well as administrators are of diverse European Canadian heritage. There is also a small number of English Language Learners and a Mental Health class.

As a practicing teacher myself, I had my own ideas of what to expect from this study. I had two main assumptions: The first assumption was regarding the perceived experiences of

teachers with diversity in Alberta. Based on my own experience as a teacher in Calgary and in Brazil, I assumed that the four participant-teachers would experience a similar influence of diversity in education as the teachers in Calgary and other parts of Alberta, such as perhaps a perception of excessive use of assessment practices and sometimes ineffective, often school-based, professional development initiatives. My second assumption, based on what I had seen as a practicum teacher, is that there were enough surveys providing statistical data portraying the decontextualized reality of teachers in Alberta. I believed that what was needed were meaningful conversations among a small number of teachers. I expected that might give a deeper insight into what is happening in the classrooms and help address some of the most important issues in education from the teachers' perspectives.

The study was organized into five chapters. First the introduction, which gives an overview of what to expect in the study. The second chapter is the literature review on the professional growth of teachers. The third chapter, the methodology, informs the reader about the research methods, participants and ethical considerations. The fourth chapter is focused on the results of the study. It shows some data extracts supporting the themes that emerged from the audio recorded interviews and focus group meeting. Lastly, the fifth chapter is a discussion of results and recommendations, comprised of three main points: discussion of results, philosophical considerations and finally, the study made some recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Canada has the third highest foreign-born population in the world, and it is estimated that by 2030, a quarter of the Canadian population could consist of Canadians born abroad (Johnston & Shariff, 2013). In many provinces in Canada, the student population has become increasingly more diverse in recent years (Alberta Education, 2010; Edmonton Public Schools report, 2014; Guo, 2012; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008). This diversity in the student body is translated in the classrooms in many different ways such as English Language Learners, learning disabilities, and gifted students (Alberta Education, 2010). Guo (2012) argues that in 2011, 25,000 students enrolled at the Calgary Board of Education were identified as English Language Learners. Roessingh and Douglas' (2012) suggest that the majority of the English Language Learners or generation 1.5 students, meaning the children of the new immigrants born or not in Canada or immigrants who came to Canada at a young age, entering the University of Calgary, for example, are academically under-performing compared to native English speaker students due to literacy issues. Similarly, First Nations students have been continually struggling to successfully finish a K-12 education (Hardes, 2006; Hinks, 2011; Howe, 2014b). Guo (2012) suggests that diversity in Canadian education goes beyond the classroom as she points to the many challenges immigrant parents face negotiating knowledge, experiences, relationships and curriculum in the context of their children's education in Alberta.

In the following quote extracted from an article issued by the Alberta Teachers Association (2013), the situation of the educational system regarding diversity in Alberta is briefly summarized:

The demands on schools and teachers are becoming more complex. Society now expects

schools to deal effectively with different languages and student backgrounds, to be sensitive to culture and gender issues, to promote tolerance and social cohesion, to respond effectively to disadvantaged students and students with learning or behavioral problems, to use new technologies, and to keep pace with rapidly developing fields of knowledge and approaches to student assessment. (p.15)

As student diversity grows, classrooms become more complex. Some international comparative indicators such as the Program for International Student Assessment, also known as PISA, points to a dropping in Canada's educational world rank in math, science and reading in recent years (Richards, 2014; PISA, 2012). Research suggests that the results of such internationally known educational comparative indicators have been influential in educational reforms (Morgan, 2016; Richards, 2017; Tasaki, 2017). In Canada, other educational comparative indicators such as the Fraser Institute reports have also been known to influence public opinion regarding schools and school districts (Cowley & Easton, 2016; Dunsmuir & Krider, 2010). PISA has become very popular among the educational public. It has, however, received negative criticism suggesting that PISA has significant limitations such as Fernandez-Cano (2016) suggests:

an inconsistent rationale, opaque sampling, unstable evaluative design, measuring instruments of questionable validity, opportunistic use of scores transformed by standardization, reverential confidence in statistical significance, an absence of substantively significant statistics centered on the magnitudes of effects, a problematic presentation of findings and questionable implications drawn from the findings for educational norms and practice. (p. 1)

In Alberta, as in other provinces in Canada, school administrators and policy makers are

attempting to meet the demands of the growing challenges in our diverse schools. Teachers are at the centre of educational reforms, as improving the 'quality of teaching' is believed to be a key aspect to enhance student performance (Cornell, 2009; Richards, 2014). The concept of 'the good teacher' has become popular among school and district administrators, who have adapted this general concept to their own understanding of what makes a good teacher in order to develop professional development initiatives (Cornell, 2009). The four teachers in this study have challenged some of these understandings of 'a good teacher' or 'what a Canadian teacher is' based on their perceived lived experiences and backgrounds guided by reflections on their own professional growth (Alberta Teachers Association, 2014b; Cornell, 2009).

The search for teacher professional growth in the context of diversity is the focus of this study, which sought to reflect on the different perspectives of four high school teachers in the urban center in a major western Canadian city. The study had three main questions: What are the perceptions of high school teachers with respect to their experiences of the increasing diversity in their classrooms and schools in Alberta? How are the official attempts to respond to the increasing diversity in the high school context perceived by teachers themselves? How do high school teachers presently manage their own professional growth in the context of both this increasing student diversity and the increase in provincial attempts of standardization to manage such diversity? These questions led to a variety of interconnected topics discussed by these teachers such as diversity in classrooms and schools, standardization through repackaging of old ideas and teachers' professional growth, which also generated subtopics.

Most of the literature on Canadian diversity in education suggests that diversity is mostly understood through the lens of race, ethnicity and social justice or low socioeconomic status (Aujla-Bhullar, 2011; Gérin-Lajoie, 2008, 2012; Harper, 1997). This means, it is mainly framed

by US authors simply around the black or white dichotomy of race. These views mainly focus on a popular jargon of diversity commonly found in American research articles such as suggesting that diversity is mainly 'white teachers teaching destitute students of color'. This quite often, spills into Canada informing literature, professional development initiatives and even educational policies (Banks & Banks, 2004; Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Gérin-Lajoie, 2008; Gérin-Lajoie, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Milner, 2010;).

According to Palmer (1982) Canadian and American views of diversity, or how these views were socioculturally constructed are different, as he argues "American and Canadians could share Anglo-Saxonism as a racial concept but 'Britishness' though closely related, was a nationalistic sentiment peculiar to Canada" (p. 98). In essence, Canada wanted to keep its 'British' roots represented in cultural values, language and religion preserved by insisting on a process of assimilation towards minority groups as pivotal to being or becoming Canadian. Most conservative Canadians, in the beginning of the twentieth century also wished that Canada would continue loyal to the British Empire (Palmer, 1982). Americans, on the other hand, were much more concerned with issues of race and "the purity of the Anglo-Saxon race" and fought to be independent from the British Empire (Palmer, 1982, p. 98).

In the context of education, during the period of the First and Second World Wars, the Canadian government launched an educational reform entitled "Crusade for Better Schools" (McLeod, 1975, p. 252), which would fundamentally establish the concept of 'assimilation to Britishness' in Canadian schools, seen through compulsory education, the substitution of 'ethnic' private schools for 'public' schools where the British cultural values were rooted and the English language was the language of instruction. McLeod (1975) argues

The crusade for educational reform had become the forum for the discussion of

educational problems related to the new Canadians. The reforms that were considered a priority or essential were those which would ensure that schools are the means of assimilating the new Canadians. (p. 262)

Ultimately, Canadian Anglo-cultural assimilation was done mainly through education throughout the years. Canadian school diversity is certainly complex and challenging, but in its own contextualized ways, it differs from the educational policies and classroom realities in American public schools. From a historical perspective, McLeod (1975) and Palmer (1982) note that the implemented culture of assimilation into the Anglo-Canadian mainstream culture, in which new Canadians are subjected to as they immigrated to Canada, has distinguished Canada from the racial based struggles seen in the American historical context.

Canada and United States continue to take different approaches to education. For example, in terms of choice of educational policies regarding curriculum, Campbell (2017) argues that "there is no one 'Canadian' approach to education" (p. 5). This means that education is a provincial matter, even though provinces such as British Columbia and Alberta, for example, present similar progressive and inclusive approaches to teaching and curriculum guidelines (Alberta Education, 2018; British Columbia Education, 2018). PISA (2017) reports suggest that Alberta students continue to present significant positive results in reading, math and science.

On the other hand, in the US, education tends to adopt a standardized model of curriculum, which prioritizes performance-oriented assessments and directs teaching toward matching testing focus. Such standardized tendencies to education in the US, as noted in the nation-wide implemented Federal school funded 'No Child Left Behind', which sought to promote school accountability through standardization, showed poor educational outcomes, especially for destitute students of color, contributing to the perpetuation of socioeconomic

inequality between minority groups and the often European descent students, commonly referred as 'white students' (Alberta Education, 2010b; Alberta Learning, 2004; Alberta Teachers Association, 2014a; Dee & Jacob, 2011; Miles & Ainscow, 2011; Oakes, 2005).

Despite the fact that there is plenty of research on teacher professional development, specific studies on the professional growth of teachers in the context of diversity in the classrooms in Alberta are scarce (Grimmett, 2014; Harwell, 2003; Rodrigues, 2005). What we do have are some Alberta government reports and other kinds of teaching guideline documents, which suggest that the diversity of classroom experiences and challenges shared by the four Alberta teachers in this study, might also be similar to the perceived experiences of teachers in other cities in Alberta (Alberta Education, 2010a; Alberta government reports 2016-17; Alberta Teachers Association, 2014a). The paucity of research specifically on the understanding of Alberta schools by Alberta teachers suggests that this study is important as it addresses some of the complexities of education in Alberta from the perspectives of the lived experiences of four high school teachers. In what follows, I try to trace out in a simple way the literature that is related to this endeavor.

Review of Literature

Overall and as already mentioned, literature on the professional growth of teachers is scarce, especially in an Alberta context (Campbell, 2017). However, one important recent study recounts the professional stories of four immigrant Alberta teachers. In the study, the author looks at the lived experiences of four immigrant teachers who had gone through a teaching bridging program in order to obtain their teaching certification in Alberta, and later applied for teaching positions at local school boards (Janusch, 2015). Beside all the participants being recent immigrants, they were quite different in terms of background and professional experiences. The

study showed that the integration of these teachers into Canadian schools was incremental and challenging. In terms of hiring, the four teachers in Janusch's study (2015) after receiving their Alberta Teachers' License were all eventually hired by one of the local school boards. After working as a supply teacher, each moved onto temporary teaching contracts, teaching either science or math.

The study suggests that culture-educational aspects of school life such as language, teaching approaches, student behavior and relationships with colleagues were very difficult, especially in the beginning, for these teachers. One out of the four teachers ended up resigning from her teaching position, while the others seemed to have overcome most of the initial challenges and adapted into the Alberta educational system.

This study is important in that it fills a vacuum in literature and helps us to better understand some of the aspects of teachers' growth in diverse contexts in Alberta. However, it is limited to a group of immigrant teachers. As most teachers might experience diversity in their Alberta classrooms more studies are necessary to understand the specific needs of Alberta teachers for professional growth. The present study builds on Januch's work and intends to go beyond it in a number of ways such as showing the perspectives of four teachers from different angles of understanding of diversity, professional growth and their journey to become a teacher.

Multiculturalism and diversity

The dichotomy of race as simply black and white as well as culture and identity as being 'us as opposed to the other' have been often used in literature usually by American, sometimes by Canadian, authors to address both diversity and multiculturalism (Banks & Banks, 2004; Gérin-Lajoie, 2012; Syed, 2010). As the terms diversity and multiculturalism have a variety of definitions, drawing a definition line between the two terms can be difficult, but nevertheless not

impossible (Silverman, 2010). She suggests that the way we look at difference could be a good indicator on how to draw a line between these two terms. According to Silverman (2010), multiculturalism could be described as mostly based on superficial forms of looking at difference, focusing on what can be clearly seen such as origin, ethnicity and cultural groups.

On the other hand, in studying diversity we seek to look at difference beyond what is visible such as the crude construct of 'whiteness', which refers to seeing all people of visibly European descent as colorless, without taking into consideration other aspects of someone's identity such as the fact that Europe is also a diverse continent. It also neglects the fact that people have different life experiences, which often impact their perceptions of the world and sense of identity (Silverman, 2010; Guess, 2006). Guess (2006) argues that "The idea and conception of whiteness derives from the dynamics of racism by intent, a type of racism that is founded upon custom and tradition, but shatters against social scientific principles" (p. 651). While the usage of the actual term multiculturalism seems to have faded in literature in recent years, in reality, multiculturalism might have taken a different form by blending into the term diversity. This means that in some cases what is visible of race, culture and social economics, solely defines the understanding of diversity. Such understanding often disregards other subtle, invisible indicators of human differences such as identity.

In literature, diversity defined through the lens of race and social justice is commonly found in Critical theory narratives (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008; 2012; McLaren, 1994). Critical theory has been in some cases a constructive instrument of reflection and describes issues of racial discrimination and social economic challenges experienced by destitute non-'white' minority populations. However, critical narratives mostly focus on bringing awareness of racial and social economic disparities and unfairness of opportunities between what is commonly discriminated

simply as 'black and white' people. Such narrative is mostly embraced by American critical theorists, and it is also found in a Canadian context but in a smaller scale (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008; 2012; McLaren, Macrine, & Hill, 2010; McLaren, 2005).

McLaren (1994) states that "we must begin candidly and critically to face our society's complicity in the roots and structures of inequality and injustice, we must face our own culpability in the reproduction of inequality in our teaching" (p. 21). Critical theorists such as Peter McLaren, for example, use critical pedagogy to reflect on social justice problems related to the supposed superiority of the dominant Euro-centric narrative, what he suggests it has contributed to perpetuate colonialist understanding of race and created unequal opportunities between 'poor students of color' and the 'white', especially through education. Fundamentally borrowing from Marxist ideas, such critical theorists portray diversity as a cultural confrontation between the oppressed, often represented by the assumed destitute people of color or non-white people and the oppressor represented by the unification of all peoples of European descent as 'white' people (Guess, 2006). However, such conceptual understanding can be divisive, and prone to more than one interpretation, as Freire (1970) suggests that the oppressor and the oppressed are not always opposites or strictly separated entities, but rather a possibility within to the coexistence of good and evil.

Freire (1970) suggests that the oppressor is not always emancipated as the oppressors themselves could be a victim of an institutionalized power pyramid, just like teachers, where whoever is on top has a significant influence on the choices and decisions being made by their subordinates. However, is this institutionalized power pyramid, which for example could simply be represented by the administrative body in education responsible for designing educational policies and initiatives implemented in schools, a permanent one? Or could these administrative

people also be replaced or even decisions evolved over time depending on the outcomes of their administrative initiatives, allowing changes? If we conceive such changes as possible, than this process could be considered cyclic. Strictly speaking, whoever makes decisions are accountable for such decisions and, in order to implement them, they rely on teachers, so if learning outcomes do not correspond to the expectations projected, then the process might be reflected upon, re-negotiated and even changed. Freire (1970) suggests that there is mobility in power as oppressor and oppressed roles are interconnected, and changes may occur over time as well. The understanding of what defines the 'oppressor' and the 'oppressed' might vary over time through experiences. This means that the oppressor and the oppressed need each other to co-exist, and they can also switch places given the opportunity. Constructively, Giroux (1988) uses critical theory to bring forward the idea of emancipation and self-reliance as he speaks of the need of especially teachers to be seen as intellectuals, acknowledging the value of experience as well as academic knowledge, which is constructed over time and can be traced to the diversity in teachers, regardless of race.

Other critical theorists such as Paul-Michel Foucault, in his work on the relationship between power and knowledge as well as the concept of having teachers as intellectuals described in the work of Henry Giroux (1988) have been important to critically reflect on the complexities of experiences of teachers and students in the context of diversity often through the lens of equality and social justice. According to Foucault (1980) "the substance sense of power, 'le pouvoir', does not exist". He argues that "power is not an institution, structure, or a certain force with which certain people are endowed; but it is the name given to a complex strategic relation in a given society" (pp. 235-236). Foucault's words regarding 'power' call for a reflection on the relationship between the 'powerful' and the 'powerless' as something that has a life of its

own, that must co-exist in order to exist. 'Power' cannot exist alone as a solo entity, but it is a combination of complex human relations where somebody is in control of those who allow themselves consciously or unconsciously to be subjugated. Giroux's (1988) approach to 'teachers as public intellectuals' focusing on the important role teachers have in teacher education by actively informing research through their practice, views and experiences in collaboration with researchers, is important to reflect on professional development practices perspectives and the role of teachers. However, critical theory seems often to place or classify experiences in a boxed way, where we locate ourselves either on one side of the matter or on the opposite side, not leaving much room to expand complex narratives and develop a wide range of perspectives that cannot be 'boxed' in one way or the other. Criticism coming from a wide range of perspectives often leads to reflection, which is vital to education.

Other unconventional approaches to difference have also challenged the possible definitions of the terms diversity and multiculturalism. In his book *The location of culture*, Bhabha (1994) skillfully articulates some important perspectives on identity and cultural understandings of difference in global times.

The 'beyond' is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past. . . . Beginnings and endings may be the sustaining myths of the middle years; but in the fin de siècle, we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference-and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion, and exclusion. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1)

Bhabha's (1994) analogy to hybridity as a third-space where culture and identity are located, points to the possibility of the construct of one's identity being a mix of cross-cultural references. Such understanding challenges the notion of pure race or the 'whiteness' versus the

'blackness' narrative commonly found among critical theoretical narratives, which places diversity in a constructed scenario of socioeconomic and cultural inequality based on race (Guess, 2006). Bhabha suggests that cultural differences are intrinsically connected to a sense of identity and mostly self-constructed, while cultures seen through the terms of either diversity or multiculturalism are simply a comparative process based on the assumption of a direct relationship between race and culture. Regardless of the criticism Bhabha's (1995) concept of hybridity have received as one might associate it with the idea of cultural assimilation, it inevitably expands the narrative of difference.

Research strongly suggests the importance of teachers "to explore and understand their own cultural identities in order to develop an understanding and an appreciation of their students' diverse cultural backgrounds" (Courtland & Gonzalez, 2013, p. 98). As Harper (1997) argues, considering teachers as neutral transmitters of knowledge, unaffected by their cultural background and own sense of identity, which is often developed through lived experiences, is improbable and problematic. This implies how very diverse teachers might be regardless of race. Merryfield (2000) argues that "it is the interrelationships across identity, power, and experience that lead to a consciousness of other perspectives and a recognition of multiple realities" (p. 440). These different understandings of diversity and multiculturalism are played out in the experiences of teachers, students and the whole school community in Alberta as seen in the following studies:

Wiltse's (2005) study focuses on the experiences and classroom dynamic interactions between a grade 9 Alberta teacher and her diverse students in a small inner-city school in Edmonton. Wiltse (2005) and Crocker and Dibbon (2008) remind us that diversity is often described in literature through the 'black and white' dichotomy narrative. However, in this

Canadian study, Wiltse (2005) argues that the classroom diversity she observed, when looked through the lens of race, did not support that dichotomy. The majority of the students were of Asian heritage, mainly of Cambodian, Chinese and Vietnamese heritage. A smaller portion of these students were members of a First Nations community, and a few were of African descent. The students of European heritage were a minority group in this school.

In another study, Guo (2011) approaches diversity in Alberta from the perspectives of the school community beyond the classroom framework. In particular, she describes the complexity of interactions between Alberta teachers and Muslim parents. In this study, Guo (2011) suggests that the many meanings of multiculturalism are still alive in Canadian education. One of them is the 'liberal diversity', which acknowledges general differences beyond race, but does not welcome non-Christian religious views or values into the curriculum.

Historically, education in Canada has favored Christian perspectives in the curriculum over other non-Christian denominations' ways of thinking (McLeod, 1975). McLeod's (1975) PhD dissertation from the University of Toronto analyzes what might constitute the beginning of formal education in Canada the process of 'compulsory' assimilation of new Canadians into this educational system in the North-West territories (out of which Alberta and Saskatchewan were created in 1905) and in the province of Saskatchewan between the years of 1885 and 1934. This was an educational system that was based on the establishment of compulsory Anglo-Saxon culture and Christian values in schools.

McLeod's extensive research into the possible birth and development of a formal educational system in Canada clearly helps us to understand how we got to be where we are now, in terms of our relationships with different people that come to live in Canada today. The majority of those who emigrated here until recently as well as the ones born in Canada

descending from some of the early pioneers are characteristically Christian of European descent. In those early years of our young nation, they slowly established themselves over the years and started to be known collectively as Anglo-Canadians most likely due to the fact that they, mainly, shared similar "language, life-style, culture and values" as well as the Christian faith (McLeod, 1975, pp. 1- 2). McLeod (1975) points to the fact that there was an understanding among the Anglo-Canadians that formal education should follow the 'European model' of education. Namely, an education that incorporated the English language, European culture and values into its teaching. The French language and education were also kept but little attention has been given to its expansion beyond some Francophone areas of Canada outside of Quebec.

The establishment of education under this European model did not embrace religious and ethnic diversity as administrators were concerned that could divide the country. They saw the assimilation of European culture and values through education as a prudent choice to move forward. At that time, the administration of education focused on assimilation in schools to implement their educational model, which Anglo-Canadians, who controlled this process, believed to be the best choice for the new nation. They also enforced the idea that "education within the public school would 'purify' and 'cleanse' the new Canadians so that they would be acceptable in other institutions and in the society at large" (McLeod, 1975, p. 11). As a possible result of this thinking, residential schools were created as an attempt to make indigenous children assimilate into the Anglo-Canadian model of education. Sadly, First Nations children were often forcibly taken away from their homes and guardians and confined to Christian-faith run boarding schools for most of their childhood (Harper, 1997). Except for this case of forced assimilation of First Nations children, most new Canadians apparently seemed to integrate into the mainstream Anglo-Canadian education, despite difficulties such as the English language assimilation by non-

English speakers and the politics of integration imposed on newcomers.

More recently, some changes in central politics, especially during the 70s and 80s under the Pierre Trudeau government, contributed to the introduction of some multicultural policies such as the 'Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms' bill, which became law (Foot, 2013). The image of Canada as a multicultural mosaic nation, which suggested that Canada had strongly benefited from the many cultures brought here through immigration, became quite popular. However, Palmer (1982) suggests that the notion of a harmonious mosaic society is only an idealistic view of Canada, far from portraying the struggles of the Canadian society to cope with its diversity. He argues that "when ethnic minorities have been able to maintain distinctive lifestyles in Canada it has not been due to primarily official or unofficial encouragement but rather their own will to survive in the face of prejudice and discrimination" (p. 8). These multicultural views of Canadian society often described in the 'mosaic' representation of Canadians suggest that for many years, Canada embraced a multicultural identity, characterized by the dichotomy of 'us', the Anglo-Canadians and 'others' seen as everybody else. Diversity in the form of multiculturalism was relegated to the visible aspects of cultural representation such "the 3Fs - food, festival and films" (Syed, 2010, p. 256).

In recent decades, there has been a significant increase in immigration of culturally, ethnically and religiously diverse immigrant groups, which might have contributed to current challenges to the established educational system, as Guo (2011) suggests tended to lean towards a liberal or selective diversity approach in more recent years. In other words, issues related to minority groups such as non-Christian religious groups are still to a certain extent, marginalized. Rayside (2014) suggests that even though, there is some recognition in schools and through some educational policies for minority diverse groups such as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender

(LGBT), nonetheless, overall Canadian education is still very conservative.

In addition, other issues with education have drawn attention in the educational context, such as the role principals have also been changing in recent years as the principals' work responsibilities have been leaning towards, mainly, an administrative role. Administrators are often represented by principals, who are 'former' teachers, who have become the head or principal teacher (Rose, 2013).

As the student population has grown, especially in large urban centers, the roles of principals have changed and have become much more demanding than what used to be. Since now, such role requires principals to carry on complex administrative tasks, in addition to what they used to have as the 'principal teacher' in charge of providing the teachers in the school with instructional guidance such as professional development opportunities (Coladarci, 2010; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). Over time, new responsibilities have been added to the principals' role such as management, which involves accountability as principals are in charge of reporting learning outcomes to stakeholders and the public as well as hiring new teachers (Alberta education, 2009). These extra responsibilities principals have to undertake made their position increasingly challenging as their administrative performance is often under scrutiny by the stakeholders and the public. Fredua-Kwarteng (2013) suggests that principals are very diverse in their values, beliefs and experiences. These differences are likely to influence how they carry on their responsibilities and respond to the tensions of the work they do.

Currently, the terms multiculturalism and diversity are often associated with educational contexts (Aujla-Bhullar, 201; Rosado, 1997; Silverman, 2010). In a Canadian context, they may carry an intrinsic meaning in our schools, especially among teachers and administrators. But what that is, needs to be explained. Regardless of the fact that teachers experience diversity on a

daily basis, mainly through interactions with their students as classrooms might draw students from all over the world, teachers have limited time to reflect on their own diversity or the diversity perceived in their students as the demands of teaching, similarly to the administrative responsibilities, have become quite complex and time consuming, leaving little or no time for reflection.

Silverman (2010) concurs that thinking of diversity through the lens of multiculturalism or visible differences often associated to race and culture would imply that teachers and administrators might differentiate themselves from the student diversity from a cultural perspective, we, teachers and administrators, are Canadians versus the diverse students, 'the other', meaning likely immigrants or English Language Learners. On the other hand, thinking of diversity beyond the visible aspects of difference would require a reflective and inclusive understanding of the many nuances of difference intrinsically embodied in ourselves, the educators, as well as in our diverse students.

As mentioned above, readily available research often based on an American context might also contribute to the confusion. The search for an adequate contextualized definition for the terms diversity and multiculturalism might lead to looking at difference from two prospects: the visible and the invisible. The fact that these two terms, diversity and multiculturalism, do not have a unique definition but a wide variety of understandings, make them subject to different interpretations, and often tends to group people under misconceptions of cultural background associated to the idea of identity (Bhabha, 1994; Guess, 2006; Silverman, 2010). For instance, the fact that you are Brazilian does not mean that you might like samba or eat rice and beans daily.

Multiculturalism, often, implies that diversity is based on visible differences between

racess, cultures and socioeconomic status among students and teachers, not taking into consideration all the other subtle aspects such as lived experiences and a self-construct of identity, which as Bhabha (1994) suggests can take many forms. These subtle differences are not only seen but often felt and perceived in the classrooms by teachers, students, administration, educational support staff, parents and the school community. Such understanding of diversity might disregard issues such as mental health, gender identity, and sexual orientation as part of the large spectrum of diversity.

As Silverman (2010) suggests, the perspectives of teachers on themes such as diversity and subsequently its connection to social justice or ethnic and culturally perceived identity have been the focus of many research initiatives, but this fact contrasts to the "little attention [that] has been paid to the colloquial semantics of multiculturalism or diversity" (p. 293). This means that there is also a historical construct of the term multiculturalism, in which these days might have taken the form of diversity, where for many generations diversity in a Canadian context was understood as 'us' the Anglo-Canadians in relation to the 'other', the immigrants or Canadians from different cultural backgrounds other than French or English (McLeod, 1975). This social-cultural construct popularized the Canadian thinking that diversity is associated mainly with other languages and cultures, which are not either English or French. Multiculturalism may well take on different meanings and understandings; however, Silverman (2010) suggests that multiculturalism can be characterized by the visualization of identity, which is consistent with the hypothesis that "diversity in the form of race (or ethnicity), gender, and physical disability should be the best indicators of participants' perceptions of multiculturalism" (p. 297).

Despite the fact that an attempt to find a clear definition for these two concepts of difference can be a source for debate, but Silverman (2010) suggests that diversity is the

"differences among groups of people and individuals based on ethnicity, race, socioeconomic status, gender, exceptionalities, language, religion, sexual orientation, and geographical area" (p. 295). That is to say, one important aspect of diversity that might clearly distinguish it from multiculturalism is that it recognizes difference beyond what is visible or implied, based on some aspects often attributed to personal perceptions of difference, which could have been informed or led by stereotypes or misunderstanding of cultures and races.

In this sense, the construct of Alberta teachers' identities by race based on their visible appearance of 'white as opposed to the other' is problematic and might suggest a materialization of multiculturalism, often aligned with post-colonial views and critical theoretical discourses (Guess, 2006). As Silverman (2010) explains:

Yet white is often imagined to be neutral, a non-color. Black, by contrast, is recognizable and carries with pre-service teachers' beliefs about diversity as a certain geographically meaningful heritage. Thus, visible versus invisible can stretch across two thresholds: A seeable identity such as race may be partly seeable and partly unseeable - and it may be either seen or unseen. (pp. 297-298)

Overall, multiculturalism and diversity are two similar terms in evidence as our student demographic changes and teaching becomes a more complex task. It is true that we have many different cultures emigrating to Canada, and specifically to Alberta, if that's what we are referring to it would make sense to call it multiculturalism. In practical terms, multicultural assumptions in education are seen today as inadequate as they imply that "culture and cultural identity is stable, unified and distinct object, transmittable by everyone, even those without intimate knowledge of the culture and equally well by those with such knowledge" (Harper, 1997, p. 200). However, diversity goes beyond the visible imprint of cultural assumptions of difference often based on

race and socioeconomic status. What can be seen in the classrooms in Alberta is a rich and diverse school population, which includes all of us, students, teachers, administrators and parents.

Teacher hiring

Another topic that emerged from the high school teachers' conversations in this study was hiring practices and the complex understanding of what a good teacher in the current context of diversity is.

Hiring practices often rely on different interpretations of this timeless question: What is a good teacher? There is not a single answer to this question but a multitude of answers, which have been re-shaped, re-invented and re-imaged over time in different parts of the world. 'What is a good teacher?' Meaning to say, what are some of the personal and professional competences a teacher needs to have or to develop in the course of their career to be effective in their educator role? This is a boundary less and timeless question that has interested the minds of many in the field of education (Cornell, 2009).

Research suggests that the different understandings or perceptions of what makes a teacher a good teacher generate a plurality of answers and often influences teacher education, hiring practices and educational policies (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Cornell, 2009; Moore, 2004). The fact that teachers are unique individuals in a plurality of classroom contexts, regardless of the educational similarities found in teachers' experiences, would challenge any definition of what a good teacher is. Due to the importance and complexity of this question in the context of education, some have argued that more time should be devoted "to develop a better conception of good teachers" (Connell, 2009, p. 9).

Hiring practices are closely related to the role of principals as administrators, who often

are former classroom teachers, in charge of hiring what they consider to be a good teacher. Coladarci (2010) highlights the importance of school support in the teachers' commitment to teaching and professional growth. The role of the school administrator, often exercised by the principal and/or vice-principal, is of key importance to the success of any educational initiative. Their duties include hiring as well as "instructional leadership, school advocacy, decision making and relations with students and staff" (Coladarci, 2010, p. 333).

Mason and Schroeder (2010) suggest that hiring practices have been the focus of diverse but not extensive Canadian studies. These studies seek to explore the challenges faced by principals to hire the 'right' individuals to fill teaching positions, especially in increasingly skilled demanding complex classrooms. The teacher recruiting role of administrators has been explored by research as education seeks to better understand how prepared these individuals are to take on such task (Hamm, 2015; Mason & Schroeder, 2010; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). It is important to know what their understandings and perceptions are of what is important in terms of teachers' professional standards. For example, what these administrators, who are usually former classroom teachers, base their views of what makes a teacher, a good teacher and how it impacts their hiring practices and future professional relationships with these teachers.

In terms of how principals themselves are hired, Rose (2013) explains that teachers are promoted to principals mostly based on the pursuit of further education and other things such as involvement on school board committees, as opposed to work related professional achievement such as student-based achievement or performance evaluation. Fredua-Kwarteng (2013) suggests that principals' values, experiences and beliefs influence the decisions they make, which includes hiring teachers based on their own particular conception of what a good teacher is. The principals' understanding of what makes a teacher candidate a 'good teacher' is often mostly

formed or developed overtime through their own lived experiences as a teacher and as an administrator.

Most of the literature on hiring practices is linked to an American context (Braun et al., 1987; Kersten, 2008; Mason & Schroeder, 2010). Research points to hiring practices as the most important of the principals' responsibilities as it impacts the quality of the education the schools offer to students. Thus, hiring an ineffective teacher can carry negative consequences and affect the school overall learning performance (Braun et al., 1987; Mason & Schroeder, 2010). Kersten (2008) suggests that teaching continues to be a mainly female profession as there is a shortage of male teacher candidates but "depending on subject area or grade level and type and location of the school district" principals might have plenty of teacher candidates to choose from (p. 356).

A study done in Ontario gives us a window of understanding on how hiring practices might be taking shape in a Canadian context (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). The study interviewed 70 principals working at various school districts in the Southern area of Ontario. Sixty percent of the principals were female; the majority had more than five years of work experience and worked in Elementary schools in an urban center. A great majority of these professionals say that regardless of the challenges due to the many responsibilities of the principals' role, the job was still rewarding.

The study oversaw changes and challenges in the role of principals as principal positions have become more demanding, due to the pressure imposed by the many changes in student demographics, which has created an increasingly diverse and significantly more complex school contexts. As Pollock and Hauseman (2015) suggest "high stakes accountability initiatives, national and international competitiveness, and standardized curriculum have reduced principals' autonomy, and changed their work, actions, and leadership practices while creating an

expectation of collaborative decision making" (p. 8). These changes have strongly contributed to stress the importance of effectiveness in principalship. This new principal trend requires a professional who is capable of responding to the demands of the critical changes in education through mainly effective leadership, tackling tasks from effective hiring practices to delivering teacher professional instruction to guide teachers. Accountability has become a critical aspect of the principal role (Harris et al., 2011). However, most principals seem to be still trying to adjust to the rapid changes and demands of their role. This includes, for example, the way communication has changed with the advent and common use of technology, to the degree of autonomy principals used to have to make decisions, and the fact that making decisions means being accountable for school effective outcomes, which are often validated through higher student academic scores shown in educational rankings such as PISA or the Fraser Institute (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015).

Another challenge principals currently have is the 'lack of time' to perform the many tasks required by this leadership position. Time constraints have become an issue as besides the general school responsibilities of a principal such as school budget and providing teachers with professional guidance, there are staff and administrative meetings, administrative professional development programs to attend, in addition to a vast number of important communication such as time-sensitive e-mails that need to be sent out or replied to a daily basis. Interestingly, only a small number of principals agreed to be observed while performing their professional tasks (Pollock & Hauseman, 2015).

Among the many school responsibilities, hiring is probably one of the most important tasks in a principal's professional agenda. Hamm (2015) suggests that the process of hiring is key importance to address the complexity of our growingly diverse classrooms in a way that "must

engage prospective teachers in difficult conversations and complex scenarios during the interview" (p. 40). Hamm (2015) goes as far as suggesting that the hiring processes should take into consideration the need to "explore the complex issues of race and color with their teacher candidates as these issues create barriers to learning and result in fear and mistrust in the school community" (p. 42), creating an extra burden to newly hired teachers and affecting their practice. Such concerns might not be as evident in a Canadian context as our challenges with diversity have a more universal understanding of difference as it includes other issues such as gender, student mental health and student learning disabilities as well as socio-economic and cultural aspect issues framed around Anglo-Saxon values and culture assimilation through curriculum.

This last aspect of Canadian diversity is quite problematic and evident especially among minority groups such as English Language Learners and Indigenous students, as these groups often struggle with academic English language efficiency and even finishing High School education. (Guo, 2011; Richards, 2014; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012). Canadian studies such as Janusch (2015) suggest that even immigrant teachers, who are assumed to be familiar with diversity, were shown to struggle with student diversity issues such as classroom management and indicated that their teaching practices were affected by the demands of teaching in some of the highly diverse classrooms in Alberta.

In brief, teacher hiring is a complex process as hiring 'the right teacher' is a fundamentally important step for principal administrators to produce effective teaching outcomes, which often result in positive accountability feedback. As it was discussed here the concept of 'the good teacher' as well as accountability are at the heart of hiring. The challenge lies in the definition of what a 'good teacher' is; as such a definition is subject to many interpretations, which only adds to the current tensions in education.

Standardization in education

Documents such as the *Focus on inquiry: A teacher's guide to implementing inquiry-based learning* (Alberta learning, 2004) and *Inquiry-based learning: Three Alberta schools that know what it takes* (Friesen, 2010) show the strong influence of inquiry-based learning approaches in the Alberta curriculum in recent years. During these years, Alberta students were along with Finnish students, South Korean students and a few other students in countries around the world, top performers in math, science and reading according to educational world rankings such as PISA. Despite the fact that for example the PISA 2012 outcomes suggest a recent slight decline in the Canadian students' performance, especially in math and science (PISA website, 2017).

Miles and Ainscow (2011) suggest that inquiry- based learning favors diverse learning as it is open to explore learning beyond the traditional comparative norms, in which learning success is often based on assessing learning by comparing one student to the other in terms of content memorization. Miles and Ainscow (2011) also argue that

[The] presence of children who are not suited to the existing 'menu' of the school can provide some encouragement to explore a more collaborative culture within which teachers support one another in experimenting with new teaching responses. In this way, problem-solving activities gradually become the working. (p. 33)

Talking about the complexity of teaching based on classroom practices observations, Miles and Ainscow (2011) suggest that teaching should not be perceived "as a loose mixture of individual features 'thrown together' by individual practitioners" as practice can be compared to a 'machine' formed by many interconnected parts (p. 24), all of them working in harmony. Hargreaves (2003) and Miles and Ainscow (2011) also suggest that teaching is strongly

influenced by a teacher's experiences. These experiences are like a 'script' seen through their practice, often guiding these teachers' pedagogical decisions. The belief that the definition of learning can only happen if we compare students' abilities to one another in the classroom as opposed to empower students to explore a diversity of learning is troublesome to education.

Overall, the 'Alberta model' inquiry-based learning approach does not seem to support standardized views often exemplified on the 'teaching to the test' practices. Rather, it advocates for teachers to look at the different 'pattern of achievement' among their students through the lens of "transformability, seeking to discover what is possible to enhance the capacity of each child in their class to learn, and to create the conditions in which their learning can more fully and effectively flourish" (Miles & Ainscow, 2011, p. 26). On the other hand, the practice of standardized educational approaches in an attempt to produce unified positive learning outcomes in the United States has become common in recent years. The apparent main purpose of implementing standardized practices is to promote accountability, which might suggest a need to control what teachers do in the classrooms. Schools and districts across the country might penalize those who do not meet the established standards of educational effectiveness (Kim, 2010).

In 2001, the United States started a promising new educational reform based mainly on three principles: standardization, assessment and accountability. The 'No child left behind Act' developed and implemented a standardization educational testing model in the US public schools. It was an ambitious plan that, regardless of the amount of funding and quantitative research, failed to deliver the educational improvement/reform in the public-school system aimed at by the US administration (US Department of Education Website, 2012). However, some critics suggest that "No Child Left Behind", overall, did not achieve significant educational learning

outcomes, as for example, even high-performance schools under such programs, particularly, excelled by focusing on 'teaching to the test' (Dee & Jacob, 2011). These high achieving schools mainly targeted their teaching resources on subjects tested by high stake government assessments. Dee and Jacob (2011) suggest that in the city of Chicago, for example, 'No Child Left Behind' had a positive impact mostly on students that were already academically performing well, close to grade level or above, but students who were struggling academically did not seem to show any signs of improvement in their academic performance.

Nevertheless, the legacy of 'No Child Left Behind' is not all negative, as it brought attention to teacher performance, which might have led to the increase on teachers' remuneration, education, and changes in teaching practices as well as the development of teaching resources, which to a certain extent contributed to a limited improvement in student performance (Dee & Jacob, 2011). Looking at the possibility of having the 'No Child Left Behind' re-stated, the Obama administration re-thought 'No Child Left Behind' policies and, changes were made to the original program, giving local schools more freedom to decide what are some of the areas that needed improvement and allocate the necessary resources to facilitate such changes (Dee & Jacob, 2011). 'No child Left Behind' is important as it is the main example of standardization in education close to home, specifically, Canada does not seem to have much in terms of literature on standardization of education. However, several studies suggest that the changes in student demographic, which has created an increasingly diverse and complex student population in the classrooms in Canada, and particularly overlooking the situation of the classrooms in Alberta, where administrators and teachers as well as the whole education community have been struggling to cope with the changes and responsibilities that this student body requires (Andrews & Lupart, 2015; Campbell, 2017; Crocker & Dibbon, 2008; Guo, 2012).

As it has been previously stated, in recent years the student demographic has been rapidly changing, and such changes might influence the provincial dynamics in education from curriculum to educational policies, and attempts of standardization could be an apparent choice to promote accountability. In the case of principals, the work of these administrators is scrutinized by stakeholders and parents, and they might feel the pressure for their schools to deliver positive learning outcomes. These outcomes are usually measured by how well students do in educational ranking institutions such as the Program for International Student Assessment and the Fraser Institute. The fact that Alberta students have experienced a slight decline in academic achievement in these tests in recent years, has brought much attention to school performance (Cowley & Easton, 2016; Chu, 2017; Richards, 2017). Research suggests that such performance indicators play a role in school reforms (Morgan, 2016).

In response to the questions "why testing? And why now?" Harris et al. (2011) answer by saying because "accountability rules" (p. 13). Morgan (2016) suggests that Canada, and that includes Alberta, might be responding to these challenges shown with the slight performance decline in international rankings by implementing "new accountability techniques" (p. 49). Other factors such as pressure for positive 'visible' learning outcomes from parents, the issues with under-performing non-native English speaking students, who might become subjected to provincial assessment testing before having fully developed an academic understanding of the English language, also add to the problem.

The 'Finnish model', for example, significantly contrasts with standardized tendencies in education seen in State educational driven programs such as 'No Child Left Behind'. Finnish teachers are regarded as highly educated and experienced professionals capable of autonomously performing critical educational tasks such as curriculum planning and student assessment

(Sahlberg, 2015).

According to Sahlberg (2015) Finland is an example of a successful story of a country rebuilt and developed after the World Wars through education as it "progressed from being a poor, agrarian, and only modestly educated nation to a modern, knowledge-based society with a high performing education system and a world-class innovation environment" (p. 18). During this time, the educational reforms in Finland moved away from a syllabi model curriculum going into a more descriptive curriculum perspective, which focused on "educational objectives, [the] process of education, and evaluation" of results (Sahlberg, 2015, p. 22). Sahlberg (2015) suggests that the Finnish educational reform was based on national empirical research involving a number of schools and teachers in the country. This led to a curriculum that would focus on educating young minds to develop their potential to "realize themselves as holistic individuals, possessing intrinsic motivation for further education" (p. 22).

Overall, the 'Finnish model' has been quite successful based on the fact that Finnish students have achieved some of the highest positions in the PISA. However, Finnish students' PISA in 2009, 2012 and 2015 are slightly lower than previous years (Heim, 2016; PISA website). Altogether, in what might be an attempt to respond to these challenges, recent reforms and professional practices hint at some of the characteristics found in standardized educational initiatives such as 'No Child Left Behind' as much attention is currently being given to standardized assessments and accountability and other standardized practices in teacher education such as the ones seen in teacher professional development initiatives focused on 'one size fits all' approaches, especially at the school level.

Assessment

The idea of accountability can be easily translated into the notion of assessment as a

tangible mean to measure performance. Research suggests that assessment for learning practices is of key importance to improve student performance (Aitken et al., 2011; Birenbaum et al., 2015; Rose, 2013). The ability of teachers to assess learning effectively is key in this process, so supporting and developing teachers' skills to properly implement assessment in their practice has become a concern in Canada, including in Alberta, which has led to the creation of many professional development initiatives, especially at school level. A combination of factors have contributed to making assessment a challenging task to be implemented by teachers such as effective "professional learning opportunities in assessment, practical barriers (e.g., time, class size, resources), and limited research on the nuances of integrating assessment for learning in diverse classroom contexts" (Birenbaum et al., 2015, pp. 123-124).

Harwell (2003) suggests that the increasing challenges in education have led to an increase in government spending: School Board members and state legislators rely on accountability to demonstrate to taxpayers that the resources invested did not go to waste (Harwell, 2003; Solano-Flores & Gustafson, 2013). They "may prefer evidence derived from more rigorous evaluation designs" or in other words, standardized government assessments (Harwell, 2003, p. 5). Local school administrators, often principals, are encouraged to run 'informal assessments' in their schools to make sure students will do well in these high stake assessments, sharing these results as they attend meetings is important to show effective leadership (Harwell, 2003).

Throughout Canada, provinces and territories have different kinds of mandated large-scale assessment, and some of them, including Alberta, participate in international ranking assessment programmes such as Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), Progress in International Reading and Literacy Study (PIRLS), and/or the Trends in International

Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (Volante & Jaafar, 2008). Country-wide, Canadian students also may take the National Assessment Programme. Currently, the Pan-Canadian Assessment Program (PCAP) seeks to inform the public about how well Canadian schools are performing, even though; it does not focus on comparativeness among different school systems (PCAP website, 2018).

The province of Alberta administers two standardized assessment tests: The Provincial Achievement Tests (PATs) taken by grade 6 and 9 Alberta students and Diploma Examinations (diplomas exams) by High School students (Alberta Education, 2018). Standardized tests such as the ones in Alberta are especially challenging for English Language Learner students as timing can be an issue, as the test might happen at a time when these students might have not yet fully developed the academic English language skills necessary to validate their actual content knowledge being tested (Cummins, 1981; Solano-Flores & Gustafson, 2013). Standardization testing methods can also be quite ineffective to show adequate results for students with learning disabilities, mental health issues, and many other problems pertaining to the large sphere of Canadian diversity in education.

In addition, generally speaking, research suggests that assessment is not very emphasized in teacher education courses and often, teachers are unprepared to skillfully use assessment as an effective tool to inform student learning progress, which might be the reason why teachers often have a negative perception of what assessment actually is (Aitken et al., 2011). According to Aitken et al. (2011)

Although teachers have a range of resources and professional development opportunities, often teachers' poor assessment practices prevail, such as carrying out unfocussed curriculum and assessment planning and viewing assessment as an "add-on" purely for

grading purposes. Further, planning is governed by the use of habitual or comfortable methods using hastily prepared tests that are not directly linked to the curriculum. When this is the case, the assessments do not provide valid inferences of student achievement or guidance for improved teaching and learning. (p. 194)

Research, especially based in the American context, suggests that tasks linked to assessment such as grading and conveying results are challenging and stressful for most teachers, and this could be connected to teachers not having the necessary set of skills and understanding to comfortably use assessment for what it is meant (Aitken et al., 2011). Even though there is not much research looking at the assessment skills of Alberta teachers, one study suggests that they might be better prepared due to the fact that some Alberta teachers actively participate in "item writers and participate in field testing and marking that ultimately leads to meaningful professional development. Their new knowledge and skills are applied to their classrooms and, consequently, diffused through their school districts" (Aitken et al., 2011, p. 194).

In summary, assessment practices have become widely used, and it is likely to be connected with the change in student demographic, which has increasingly grown diverse and challenged teachers to tangibly determine how much their students actually know, especially when it comes to the non-native English speakers and other minority diverse groups (Alberta Education, 2006; Solano-Flores & Gustafson, 2013). Research suggests that assessment has become a key component to the possible response to the increasing diversity in Alberta schools, and teacher education as well as professional development practices should be aligned with the teachers' needs to develop the necessary competences to purposely use assessment as a pedagogical tool (Aitken et al., 2011; Alberta Education, 2006; Alberta Education, 2010a; Solano-Flores & Gustafson, 2013).

Teacher education

The diversity in student demographics has also brought attention to teacher education and its relationship with the increasingly challenging pedagogical demands in teaching. Integration between theory and practice is a recurring discourse in teacher education and a source for many understandings of how this process could take form (Falkenberg, Goodnough, & MacDonald, 2014). Falkenberg, Goodnough, and MacDonald (2014) state that "the integration of theory and practice is not a problem of applying theory in practice, but rather a problem of helping teacher candidates develop practical wisdom" (p. 340).

Falkenberg, Goodnough, and MacDonald's (2014) study looking into how theory and practice can be integrated and what are some of the challenges, and possibilities for this process to take place from the perspectives of teachers. The study brings three observations that might be important as we reflect on this matter. The first observation is based on traditional views of integration between theory and practice such as the common assumption or belief that universities and schools have two different roles in forming teachers. Namely, universities are meant to provide teachers with theory, academic teaching skills and knowledge and schools are sites where teachers put into practice what they learned in the courses they took while at the university (Falkenberg, Goodnough, & MacDonald, 2014). Secondly, the challenge of addressing integration between theory and practice is in itself complex, as the 'problem' with such integration or the 'challenges' of integration can be understood or perceived differently (Falkenberg, Goodnough, & MacDonald, 2014). For example, if the problem with integration between theory and practice is about connecting these two concepts, so teachers might need help to make this link between the abstract theoretical concepts they learned at the university and the practical application of such concepts in their classroom practice. And the last observation relates

to the integration between theory and practice, possibly meaning, helping to develop in these teachers 'wisdom' or reflecting skills to be used in their diverse contextualized teaching practice (Falkenberg, Goodnough, & MacDonald, 2014). As Hammerness et al. (2012) suggest teachers need to "develop the ability to 'think like a teacher', but also to put what they know into action" (p. 359). These three observations give a good foundation on moving forward with the whole theory and practice narratives as there is not one possible answer to what teachers often refer as the disconnection between what they learn through courses at the university level and the practicality of these courses in the contextualized teaching situations that take place in schools.

In Canada, teacher education research has grown over the years (Hale & Clark, 2016). However, Howe (2014a) suggests that Canadian teacher education initiatives have often followed "the trends and tendencies of educational reform from our larger neighbor to the south, albeit some years later" (Howe, 2014a, p. 589). In terms of faculty demographic, Crocker and Dibbon (2008) argue that most professors teaching in teacher education programs are female and have been school teachers previous to becoming faculty. They also suggest that teacher education programs vary in length and approaches throughout Canadian provinces. Ellis et. al. (2013) and Hale and Clark (2016) suggest that research addressing the experiences and knowledge of teachers are starting to grow, but it is still under-researched.

Research has also paid little attention to the conceptualization of academic work in teacher education (Ellis, McNicholl, & Pendry, 2012; Hale & Clark, 2016). Ellis, McNicholl and Pendry (2012) suggest that there have been some studies on 'education professoriate' mostly focusing on "the transition points between prior experience, graduate school and becoming faculty" (p. 687). According to Ellis, McNicholl and Pendry (2012) "this interest in the 'becoming' of university-based teacher educators and the ways in which universities as

employers might support these transitions is evident in recent research literature" (p. 687). As professors are the ones preparing teachers to take theory into practice, their understanding of their role and teaching skills as educators of teachers are also key to development and implementation of effective teacher education programs.

Generally speaking, teacher education is a career long process for school teachers and may be divided by formal education usually offered by universities and schools or external teacher education agencies in the form of professional development. And informal education, which is knowledge gained often through (teaching) experience and teacher self-motivated learning through more informal professional development practices such as grassroots professional development.

In terms of formal teacher education, which usually includes a portion of theory and practice, the tensions mainly reside on the fact that theory is often disassociated from practice, finding how to integrate theory into practice has been a challenge for teacher education programs (Falkenberg, Goodnough, & MacDonald, 2014). Similar to the understanding that there is an amplitude of complexity to define what a 'good teacher is', Crocker and Dibbon (2008) suggest that there is not a consensus for what are the most effective approaches and features to be found in teacher education; however, all teacher education programs to a certain extent share some commonalities. According to Crocker and Dibbon (2008) most teacher education programs focus on different areas teachers are interested in going into, such as generalist elementary or discipline driven secondary education specializations. The course load to be undertaken by the student-teachers is related to their area of specialization and they are usually aligned with provincial teacher certification requirements.

Another similarity among many teacher preparation institutions is that they also offer

graduate programs, besides the undergraduate teacher education program. However, these graduate programs are mostly considered continuing education. Crocker and Dibbon (2008) suggest that there is a disconnection between these programs and the reality of Canadian schools, for example, courses that would be important to address the needs of the school community such as special education for example are "treated as a post-degree diploma or second degree but is not identified as an area of emphasis in initial teacher education" (p. 31).

In addition, there are new challenges in teacher education as the student-teacher demographics have been changing with the increase in immigration and classrooms becoming more diverse (Cruickshank, 2004). Many of these immigrants are teachers looking into going into education for Canadian certification (Janusch, 2015). It has become more challenging to teacher programs and professors to cater the courses and teaching skills to the needs of these diverse student-teachers, as Cruickshank (2004) suggests:

Teacher education programs tend to have been developed for students who have recently graduated from local education systems and presume in-depth knowledge and recent experience of local secondary and primary education. Teachers with overseas training may be operating from a different knowledge base of education. (p. 130)

In Alberta, there are transitioning teacher education programs for teachers trained abroad; the University of Calgary, for example, has an Accreditation Program for Internationally-Trained Teachers, which has had a positive impact for many teachers trying to validate their teacher certification in Canada (University of Calgary website). However, Janusch (2015) suggests that this transition process is complex and integration is challenging as teachers try "to rebuild and reestablish their professional lives" while reflecting on the "dichotomy of who they have been and who they are becoming, not only teachers, but also as family members and new citizens of

Canada" (p. 303).

Crocker and Dibbon (2008) suggest that bridging theory and practice has been a concern in teacher education. Many institutions, especially in the United States, have followed the footsteps of some medical hospitals initiatives that developed 'professional development schools (PDS) creating opportunities to university faculty and K-12 school teachers as well as pre-service teachers and schools to collaborate in research and learning initiatives.

Teacher professional development is another important aspect of teacher education. According to Opfer and Pedder (2011) "much of the research on professional development has yielded disappointing results with teacher professional learning activities often being characterized as ineffective" (p. 376). They also suggest that most of the current literature on professional development is not clear on describing how teachers learn. The problem lies mainly on simplified understanding of how teachers actually learn, often, disregarding teachers' experiences and teaching contexts.

As educational reforms focusing on teaching effectiveness rely mainly on teachers, depending on them to adhere and implement any proposed reform initiatives, teacher education as well as continuing education have become central to the success of such reforms (Broad & Evans, 2006; Grimmer, 2014). Harwell (2003) points to two important aspects in educational reforms: teacher education and the teaching context. Alexander, Heavside and Farris (1998) and Harwell (2003) suggest that when teachers experience effective teacher professional development opportunities, these newly acquired pedagogical skills are carried on into the classroom practice, which, often, results in significant improvements in student performance.

Professional development has become a common form of teacher continuing education. Over the years, professional development practices have consisted of teachers attending

ineffective traditional professional development programs such as conferences, seminars, workshops and courses, often provided at school or district level, in which teachers had no input on what, was important to learn (Rodrigues, 2005). Rodrigues (2005) also suggests that these programs were used mainly to articulate educational policies, standardized skill-competency statements and methods, and delivered to teachers in the form of standardized courses based on experts' knowledge of what teachers' classroom challenges were.

Research suggests that this traditional professional development approach has mostly failed to promote the professional growth teachers need to improve classroom practices and improve learning outcomes (Bautista & Ortega-Ruiz, 2015; Harwell, 2003; Rodrigues, 2005). Harwell (2003) suggests that teacher professional development should not be considered simply as an 'event'. In order to be effective professional development should be understood in a broader perspective as an important part of the teachers' journey, the necessary 'process' that leads to teachers' pedagogical growth. So, if traditional professional development practices are not ideal, what is the 'right' professional development approach? The problem about what is 'good' professional development is just as complex as the attempt to come up with a formula of what constitutes a good teacher. Opfer and Pedder (2011) suggest that good teachers "understand that teaching has both contextualized and decontextualized properties" (p. 394).

Ultimately, a good teacher needs to have pedagogical knowledge, skills and abilities, and use them according to their students' contextualized needs. They add that "good teachers affect student learning by making a distinction between what is unique to a specific context and what is generalizable to other contexts and student groups" (Opfer & Pedder, 2011, p. 394). If we would apply a similar concept to professional development, we may say that good professional development is contextualized to attend to the reality of teachers' classroom experiences and

catered to their needs.

In terms of professional development there is not a recommended method as 'the best' as teachers are unique individuals teaching different students in different contexts. However, Harwell (2003) suggests three aspects seem to be important in recognizing the effectiveness of professional development programs: First, the professional development initiative has to develop in teachers a sense of consciousness as teachers explore learning as opposed to simply memorizing given information; the professional development instructor is a facilitator of active learning; and lastly, learning is not an isolated event but develops through social interaction. Taking into consideration what teachers think of their own process of learning might also contribute to the effectiveness of professional development practices as some studies such as Bandura (1995), Schunk (1981), Zimmerman and Ringle (1981) and Harwell (2003) suggest that teachers' beliefs are an important factor in teachers' growth, and these beliefs are influenced by professional opportunities provided to these teachers to interact with other educators, what may lead to a meaningful reflection on their practice.

When teachers take time to interact, study together, discuss teaching, and help one another put into practice new skills and strategies, they grow and their students' behaviors improve accordingly. This is because social persuasion is a powerful means of changing beliefs, as has been suggested by a number of researchers. (Harwell, 2003, p. 4)

Overall, research on professional development suggests that professional development initiatives often do not lead to the professional growth of teachers (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). This can be due to how teachers' learning is perceived through professional development practices such as the popular use of approaches like 'One Size Fits All' model or traditional approach, which are widely implemented in schools, regardless of a large body of research suggesting their

ineffectiveness (Bautista & Ortega-Ruiz, 2015; Harwell, 2003; Rodrigues, 2005; Opfer & Pedder, 2011), given the fact that teachers are not engaged in their own learning but passive recipients of knowledge. Teachers' input in their own learning through professional development is an important factor to improve teaching effectiveness (Rodrigues, 2005; Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

Informal education is complex but also important as teachers just like students are always learning through their daily experiences, which usually influence their practices. Teachers often seem to rely on experience as a form of continuing education and to grow professionally. Miles and Ainscow (2011) suggest that teachers' expertise is often based on 'improvisation'. In simple words, teachers' intuitive reactions to unexpected learning outcomes during a class are mainly founded on previous experiences. These teachers rely on their teaching experiences to address or deal with 'unexpected situations in the context of teaching', and every time they experience something new or an unexpected event, those teachers add that 'learning moment' to their 'teaching toolbox', hoping that it will eventually come in handy in a future similar occasion thereby becoming an automatic response to similar situations.

According to Miles and Ainscow (2011), this automatic response suggests that teachers should have enough time to reflect on their practice. This is why having the opportunity to see a colleague at work is so crucial to the success of attempts to develop practice. Hiebert, Gallimore, and Stigler (2002), Miles and Ainscow (2011) as well as Nascimento (2010) suggest that in these teacher sharing opportunities, where teachers share their classroom experiences with other teachers, may create a common space where teachers feel comfortable to reflect on 'what's that they do' and 'what would be the ideal way of doing what they do'. In this space, the assumption of 'knowing' is often disturbed and reflected upon in the spirit of nothing being taken for granted.

Miles and Ainscow (2011) argue that:

At the heart of the processes in schools, where changes in practice do occur, is the development of a common language that colleagues can use to talk to one another and, indeed, to themselves about detailed aspects of their practice. Without such a language teachers find it very difficult to experiment with new possibilities. (p. 29)

Miles and Ainscow (2011) also suggest that this approach to teacher practices can be seen as a way to address teaching challenges on an individual level prior to taking it to the organizational level. This means, teachers take an active role in their own professional growth as they try to share and figure possible responses to their classroom challenges based on both their own and their teaching colleagues' experiences as opposed to putting these issues forward, primarily, to the school or district administration.

Chapter 3: Methodology

As student demographics have become increasingly more diverse, teachers have been challenged to expand their teaching skills to meet the complex needs of such a student population. Some research studies suggest that professional development, for example, is very important for teachers to improve their practice (Little, 1993; Shymansky, Yore, & Anderson, 1999). Therefore, professional development has often become the main instrument to address the needs of teachers for professional growth. Interestingly, some of the most popular professional development practices implemented in schools and that teachers must attend, often, follow the 'One Size Fits All' model or traditional model of professional development that is, generally, deemed ineffective (Broad & Evans, 2006). Teachers' reflections and shared experiences with professional development as well as other educational initiatives and policies are key for education to evolve.

This study is built on the understanding that there are many factors that impact teachers' performance and professional growth as well as affect student learning outcomes, especially in the context of diversity in the schools in Alberta. This study seeks, in the context of a growing diversity in schools in Alberta, to contribute to a further understanding through four teachers' perceptions on some of the main educational issues and their daily classroom experiences as they navigate and reflect on the complexity of such current issues in education that impact teaching.

Research Questions

The perspectives of four Alberta high school teachers were sought around the following research questions:

A) What are the perceptions of high school teachers with respect to their experiences of the increasing diversity in their classrooms and schools in Alberta?

B) How are the official attempts by the Ministry of Education responding to this increasing diversity in Alberta classrooms and schools as perceived by the teachers themselves? (Diversity of origin of students, teachers and other kinds of diversity)

C) How do high school teachers presently manage their own professional growth in the context of both this increasing diversity and the increasing provincial attempts responding to this in order to manage such diversity?

Multiple Case Study

In the literature, many theorists such as Creswell (2013), Denzin and Lincoln (2005), Merriam (1998), and Yin (2003; 2009) agree that case study is a useful method to gather data, which produces a "product of inquiry", as it is purposely used in this study (Creswell, 2013, p. 73). Case studies have become popular among researchers exploring the experiences of women, and the teachers in this study were all female practitioners who had returned to university seeking professional growth, after acquiring experience teaching (Padula & Miller, 1999).

Creswell (2013) describes a case study and/or multiple cases study as a qualitative approach:

in which the investigator explores a bounded system (a case) or multiple bonded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information (e.g., observations, interviews, audiovisual material, and documents and reports), and reports a case description and case-based themes. (p. 73)

This research was a multiple case study, which investigated the experiences and perspectives of a small group of four high school English language arts teachers, who provided their views and understandings into important issues in education involving the topic of diversity (Creswell, 2013; Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013; Yin, 2009). Multiple case study method was an ideal tool to have a closer look at specific situations and/or themes, in which different

teachers can relate and share similarities, even if teaching in different contexts. The reasons for using a multiple case study approach are as follows:

From the beginning, I knew that the complexity of diversity was of key importance to education, especially among teachers. I wanted to explore multiple cases of practicing teachers in-depth, their experiences and views on current issues concerning education by inquiring of a small group of teachers' experiences and perspectives and make a comparison to find common themes (Creswell, 2013). I decided for a multiple case study as I had four participants who were diverse in terms of experiences and contexts as they taught in different schools and could provide different insights into the data (Creswell, 2013).

My goal was to use a holistic approach that is to locate my understanding of the data into the different contexts in which they took place in the experiences of each of the four participants, and then compare them to one another to create a whole shared contextual understanding. Merriam (1988), for example, points to the importance of contextualizing the information in research. I also provided details of each participants' contextual and themed data, and once the data from the four participants was collected and transcribed, I performed a "cross-case analysis" (Creswell, 2013, p. 75). Another important case study characteristic in this research was the fact that the data was quite extensive and collected from a variety of qualitative sources, such as background questionnaire, interviews and a focus-group meeting (Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Yin, 2009). Finally, after collecting, describing and analyzing each of the four multiple case studies information, I interpreted and reported my findings based on the perceived experiences and perspectives of these four teachers in this study. Creswell (2013) suggests that the researcher's interpretation is mainly based on what one 'learns' from the participants' collected information. The data provided by these four participants points to some of the most

compelling issues in the context of diversity in education that impact teachers' growth.

A parallel example of multiple case studies that I reviewed was Padula and Miller's (1999) study as it explored the experiences of a small group of women, who went back to school after taking time off to raise a family and/or pursue a career. All women were enrolled in one of the Psychology graduate courses at the Midwestern Research University. The two researchers in the study, Padula and Miller (1999), met the criteria required of the participants as they were also returned female, full-time, graduate students enrolled in Psychology courses at Midwestern University after being absent from school for a few years due to personal commitments such as pursuing a career and, especially, starting a family and raising children (Padula & Miller, 1999). The participants were made up of four diverse, female, graduate students at different stages in their program, who provided an extensive and rich data. Padula and Miller's study had three main open-questions:

1. How do women in a Psychology doctoral program describe their decision to return to school?
 2. How do women in Psychology doctoral program describe their reentry experiences?
 3. How does returning to graduate school change these women's lives?
- (p.328)

This multiple case study used a variety of qualitative sources to collect the individual experiences of these four participants such as interviews, documents and observations. The information was streamed into common themes, then transcribed and discussed by the researcher.

A further examination of the literature on case study method points to many advantages as well as some challenges a researcher may encounter. According to Merriam (1998), one of the advantages of case studies is that a case study offers the researcher the opportunity to use previous experiences to enhance a further understanding of a topic. In addition, as Yin (2003)

explains, a case study encourages us to explore 'why' and 'how' things happen, especially in education, and "allows the investigator to retain the holistic data and meaningful characteristics of real live events" (p. 3). Yin (2003) also suggests that a case study is not simply a re-telling of a story or a fact, "its purpose is to establish a framework for discussion and debate" (p. 2). He argues that case studies main objective in presenting teaching cases is to create an opportunity for participants to discuss and learn from each other's perspectives by debating events of key importance to the group. Merriam (1998), like Yin (2003), also encourages the use of previous experiences to enhance and further understand a research subject. The exploration of 'why' and 'how' things happen in a certain way is better understood through preserving the entire meaning of lived experiences (Yin, 2009).

Yin (2009) argues that a case study mainly seeks to provide the foundation for discussing and debating complex issues surrounding these lived experiences. For example, the literature on case studies often refers to what Yin (2009) suggested to be the three main types of case studies; Exploratory, explanatory, and descriptive. Exploratory case studies seek to further explore a subject such as a question or an assumption put forward by the researcher (Yin, 2009). Explanatory also suggests a closer reading into a phenomenon to better understand its implications in terms of experiences. Finally, a descriptive case study, which as the name suggests, describes a studied phenomenon as it unfolds.

However, it is also important to acknowledge the possible challenges one may encounter using a case study method. Some of the criticisms on case studies suggest that the lack of structural guidelines may lead to problematic interpretations of experience such as a possible mishandling of evidence due to the researcher's bias interpretation of the data (Yin, 1984). As a method, case study can examine a single case or multiple cases. It is suggested that a single case

study can be challenging as it focuses on one participant's contributions, making it difficult to generalize its findings. Another aspect of case studies often under scrutiny is its lengthy produced data, which makes it difficult to handle and summarize in a research writing format.

Overall, the choice of using a multiple case study method proved to be an important instrument to translate the experiences and perspectives of these four teachers in the context of diversity as the results that follow will show.

Theoretical Framework

This research is theoretically framed around grounded theory. Creswell (2012) defines grounded theory as a systematic procedure that "enables you to generate a broad theory about your qualitative central phenomenon 'grounded' in the data" (p. 422). Grounded theory is a systematic, often qualitative, methodology to data collection and analysis, which aims to formulate a theoretical hypothesis of the subject being investigated based on the data (Creswell, 2012; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Its research niche is in the Social Sciences, but grounded theory is also used in other fields of research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

I chose to use a grounded theoretical framework as I reflected and exhausted my options to find an ideal theoretical frame of reference to voice the four teachers' rich experiences and insightful perspectives in the context of diversity in education in Alberta. For example, I explored the possibility of using critical theory as a theoretical framework in this study to take advantage, to a certain extent, of the many layers of understanding and investigative aspects described in case studies.

I reflected on the applicability of a theoretical understanding of the power struggles and tensions in education, especially referring to the role of administrators, educational experts and often scholars, which could speak to themes such as hiring practices and the myth of 'the good

teacher' as well as publishing and research orientation towards a capitalist market education, which places teachers as consumers of prepackaged educational initiatives, that not always speak to the needs of teachers for professional growth (Connell, 2009; Freire, 1970; Moore, 2004). According to Felluga (2015) critical theory is concerned with "the historical conditions allowing for the establishment of a particular identity formation, as well as the alternative models of subjectivity that failed to become dominant in a given period" (p. 6). The work of critical theorists such as Paulo Freire, whose work is recognized worldwide, was very important in translating the challenges of Brazilian teachers in terms of teacher education, more precisely professional development during my Master's research looking at the professional development experiences of Brazilian teachers and their struggle to navigate the significant influence of politics in education in a Brazilian context (Freire, 1970; Nascimento, 2010; Saul & Silva, 2011). However, in the Canadian context, in which this study took place, its applicability was subtle and somehow reshaped and limited.

In terms of critical theory in the context of this study, I mostly thought of the work of Paulo Freire, especially in the book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, which has served as a landmark to address some of the complexities and tensions of education, especially in socioeconomic and culturally diverse contexts. There are, mainly, two important points in Freire's work that indeed make their way into the stories of the teachers in this study. First, Freire's critical contributions can be applied as we talk about the relationship of 'the oppressor and the oppressed' in the context of this study represented by principals through their perspectives and hiring practices that can be, often, noticed in the complex conceptualization of what is 'a good teacher' used on teachers during hiring processes. For example, a principal at some point in his/her career was teacher, who might have seen administration as the 'oppressor' as he/she could not always fully

understand why decisions were made on behalf of the teachers without regard to their input. As these teachers ascend to top-level positions such as principal, they might change their views on those who once they perceived as being the 'oppressor'. Secondly, Freire's work might also address the complexities of looking at diversity through solely 'race and social justice', disregarding experiences and its influence on creating a sense of individual identity. Popular beliefs built through generational traditions have contributed to much of the assumptions of race and culture that are still in fashion to this day (Palmer, 1982). Again, I draw from the dialectical and complex understanding of the terms 'oppressor and oppressed' described in Freire's work to say that both terms 'oppressor and oppressed' cannot be limited to a person based on his/her visible race, but an accepted idea attributed to a role this person performs.

However, one cannot solely rely on the dialectical relationship presented by Freire of 'the oppressor' and 'the oppressed' to fully understand diversity as between the black and white narrative, there is a grey area what theorist like Bhabha (1994) calls a 'third space', meaning an adaptation process to time and space in a given context. More simply, one might not fit in any of the two perspectives Freire presents, but rather have or develop over time characteristics that can resonate with both roles, 'the oppressor and the oppressed' in a given time and space. After a deep reflection on critical theory, especially Freire's work in his philosophical approach to the process of conscientization, I found that critical theory did not completely address the many layers of complexity entrenched in the experiences of these four diverse Alberta teachers, which go beyond the issues of 'race' seen in the socio-construct of 'whiteness' as opposed to 'blackness' and social justice (Guess, 2006), which is often prevalent in critical theoretical approaches (;Gérin-Lajoie, 2012; McLaren, 2005; Milner, 2010).

Choosing grounded theory to frame this study was significantly important as it allowed

me to structure the data in a way which facilitated a gain of understanding necessary to formulate a theoretical hypothesis based on the information provided by the participants. Grounded theory has gained popularity as a theoretical and methodological platform in many different fields of study such as education, psychology and medicine. It started in the field of medical sociology by investigating the experiences and perspectives of dying patients in hospitals in the United States (Charmaz, 2006). Grounded theory was developed in the 60s by two sociologists: Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, "who felt that that the theories used in research were often inappropriate to and ill suited for participants under study" (Creswell, 2013, p. 84).

Historically, grounded theory emerged as a qualitative theory, in a time where such 'liberal' approach to research was under strong scrutiny by quantitative theorists who strongly questioned the validity of qualitative data as they believed it to be "impressionist, anecdotal, unsystematic, and biased" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 5). Charmaz (2006) argues that these quantitative theorist advocates relied on concrete data, drawing from other studies through precision research methods and developing such theories, which most likely contributed to the creation of new theories. Grounded theorists such as Glaser and Strauss (1967) as well as Charmaz (2006) point to some important characteristics found in grounded theory. As Charmaz (2006) summarizes grounded theory:

- Synchronizes the focus on both the data and analysis during the research.
- Codifies and categorizes the data to build a hypothesis.
- Compares constantly the information as the data analyzes evolves.
- Builds a theoretical hypothesis as the research evolves.
- Addresses the data using a memo-writing format by elaborating "categories, specify their properties, define relationships between categories, and identify gaps" (pp. 5-6)

- Uses the data mainly to create a theoretical understanding of the subject being studied, and not a demographic representation.
- Conducts the literature review "after developing an independent analysis" (p. 6).

There are basically two different types of approaches to grounded theory: The Procedural Focused Grounded Theory and the Constructive Grounded Theory. The two approaches are slightly different, although, they both focus on "the data from the field, especially in the actions, interactions, and social processes of people" (Creswell, 2013, p. 84). The procedural focused grounded theory is "more prescribed and structured", following a set of strict rules of procedures (Creswell, 2013, p. 84). This approach to grounded theory is defended by Anselm Strauss, but discouraged by Burney Glaser, even though the two theorists initially worked together to develop the theory, they later parted ways in their opinions on how procedural focused grounded theory should be (Creswell, 2013). In Kathy Charmaz's book called *Constructing Critical Theory* (2006), she advocates for a constructive grounded theory approach, more structurally flexible, and looking at the data from a constructivist and interpretative perspective. As Charmaz (2006) explains that in a constructivist grounded theoretical approach "the end-point of your journey emerges from where you start, where you go, and with whom you interact, what you see and hear, and how you learn and think. In short, the finished work is a construction of yours" (p. XI).

In order to explain how grounded theory works, Charmaz (2006) points to the perspectives and experiences of a young lady called "Margie", a promising athlete and excellent student who suddenly fell sick with rheumatoid arthritis, which changed her life:

Now think about how to study stories like Margie's. How do you make sense of the events that Margie Arlen describes? What might you see in her statements that you would like to explore further with her and others who have experienced physical losses?

Imagine that you pursued these questions in a qualitative study and aimed to develop a conceptual analysis of the materials. How would you go about conducting your research and creating the analysis? (p. 2)

As a theoretical framework, constructive grounded theory involves taking into consideration the contexts and the lived experiences of the participants, the focus is the information participants provide through 'statements and actions', and how we can rationalize and explain this information (Charmaz, 2006). In this multiple case study, specifically, using a grounded theory approach was important as its design favored the extensive data analysis to be sorted by codes and categories, which were constantly compared. It also enabled me to extend the literature review to better understand the results I was finding as the data analysis evolved, and, importantly, allowed a theory to emerge based on the information provided by the participants. As I previously mentioned, I came into this study with three main questions:

- 1) What are the perceptions of high school teachers with respect to their experiences of the increasing diversity in their classrooms and schools in Alberta?
- 2) How are the official attempts by the Ministry of Education responding to this increasing diversity in Alberta classrooms and schools as perceived by the teachers themselves? (Diversity of origin of students, teachers and other kinds of diversity)
- 3) How do high school teachers presently manage their own professional growth in the context of both this increasing diversity and the increasing provincial attempts responding to this in order to manage such diversity?

These three questions were based on my experience as an Alberta educator teaching in the context of diversity as well as on my biases as a Brazilian immigrant, who had to go through the process of teacher validation in Canada. The use of a constructive theoretical framework was

important to purposely develop the open-questions in the different interviews and the background questionnaire, allowing the four high school teachers to draw from their perceived experiences and perspectives in diversity in the classrooms in Alberta, constructing the different narratives found in these multiple case studies.

The teachers in this study were keen to address the many obstacles to teaching in diverse classrooms, especially when teachers' and students' own needs and differences are often defined by two opposed and complex understandings of diversity under the 'black and white' narrative, which privileges and focus on students' needs to be seen as diverse as opposed to teachers who are just plainly perceived as 'white, middle class, female' individuals. These teachers wanted to point out that they are just as diverse as their students in their experiences and self-construct of identity as well as in their needs for support to grow and develop.

The participants in this study also provided rich and diverse data in the form of multiple cases or stories highlighting the perceived experiences of these four Alberta high school teachers as they reflect on their journey to strive and grow as professional educators in the context of diversity (Creswell, 2012). This data was also lengthy and complex, as perceptions of experiences usually are. The participants often expanded the questions being asked, leading to new themes and also generating a wide variety of perspectives within the same theme, which were somehow different but also interconnected. Charmaz (2006) suggests that constructive grounded theory favors coding extensive data in order to better understand and make sense of what is being said by the participants. She explains that "Coding distills data, sorts them, and gives us a handle for making comparisons with other segments of data. Grounded theorists emphasize what is happening in the scene when they code data" (Charmaz, 2006, p. 3). At the end of this study, the data suggested that these four high school teachers give an important

contribution to their field by hypothesizing that there is not much teachers' input informing educational policy in Alberta at the present time. These teachers postulated that there is a limited understanding and an under-representation of teachers' experiences and perspectives on the main issues afflicting education in the context of diversity in Alberta. They have also expressed concern to the troubling responses to such issues by educational policies and educational training initiatives based on current available theoretical understanding and perceptions of what is happening in the diverse Alberta classrooms and how teaching is being affected as well as what are the best practices to address such problems.

Overall, the teachers in this study, Jane, Maria, Jocelyn and Anna, one by one, shared their lived journey through teacher education: From being a student to being hired as a teacher; They share their views on the reality of the classroom teaching compared to their expectations of what teaching would be like and finally, where these educators stand now as teachers teaching in the context of diversity and seeking professional growth. These four teachers also point to a gap in the field of education that needs to be addressed in research to better understand the impact of diversity in teacher education from the perspective of Alberta teachers.

More studies seeking to investigate the many roles, responsibilities and tensions in the work of school educators are urgently needed. According to these teachers, as I shall attempt to show in the results section, current theoretical studies approaching diversity in the classrooms are decontextualized and not representative of the reality of what teachers experience as they finish their teacher preparation and move into the teacher work force. Such inadequate studies are, often, used to support educational initiatives in Alberta, which consequently do not adequately address the real issues in education, and fail to promote the professional growth of teachers or improve educational practices as my results that appear in chapter five will illustrate. But this

story in detail is yet to come.

Context of the Study

This study took place partially online, via Skype and emails as all four background questionnaires were emailed to the participants, three out of four individual interviews and some of the research related interactions between the participants and researcher were via Skype. However, one of the participants, Jane, preferred to have her individual interview done in person as opposed to online via Skype. Aside from the questionnaire and the individual interviews, the other part of the study was an in person focus group meeting. This section of the research was situated in one of the rooms at the University of Alberta in the city of Edmonton.

The participants in this study were all graduate students at the University of Alberta. They were also female English language arts high school teachers, currently, working for public schools. The fact that the participant sample was single-gendered, in this study specifically meaning female only participants, was not surprising as from a previous experience when I recruited volunteering teachers to participate in my Masters' thesis research in Brazil; I noticed that most of the willing participants were also female teachers. In this study, it was not any different as no male teacher applied to participate in the study. Generally speaking, in a North America context most teachers are female (Cockrell et al., 1999). This aspect is important to mention as Padulla and Miller (1999) suggest that case study has been, often, used as a powerful instrument to convey the experiences and perspectives of women in education. However, it is a limitation of this study that no males were included since none offered to be part of it.

Participants

The participant sample was composed of four high school teachers who were purposely diverse in terms of lived experiences and backgrounds. The four participants will be called

Maria, Jane, Anna and Jocelyn. This summary mainly seeks to describe in a condensed form, the teachers' overall experiences and contexts explored during this research (Saldanha, 2009).

Maria

The first participant is Maria, who is an English language arts Canadian teacher born and primarily, educated in an Eastern European country. Maria is in her late forties. She was born and raised in Bulgaria, during a time the country was under the political influence of the communist Soviet Union. Maria speaks three languages, Bulgarian being her mother tongue. She grew up in a very homogeneous society, where the great majority of students were ethnic Bulgarians.

Maria's primary degree, when she was still living in Bulgaria, was a Bulgaria philology degree as she loved cultures and languages. Maria argues that at first, she did not intend to become a teacher. However, she needed a job, so teaching became the most reasonable option and made sense financially. She, then, decided to take some additional courses to receive a teaching degree. In that sense, Maria thinks that her experiences as a student in Bulgaria were quite different from the one of a student-teacher in Canada as she suggested that she was not required to do a practicum for example but went straight into the classroom after her studies.

In terms of school teaching context, Maria finished her teacher preparation and taught for 6 years, Grades 9-12 in a vocational school of Chemistry and Biotechnology in Bulgaria. In Canada, she has been teaching high school in one of the large urban cities in Alberta for over 15 years. She claims her teaching experience in Bulgaria was also quite different from her experience in Canada. According to Maria, the student demographic in Bulgaria was mostly formed by a ethnically homogenous Bulgarian student population, which differs from what she faced in Canada, where the student population in her current school is made up of more than 60 different languages and cultures from around the world. The school has over 2,500 students and

is a designated English Language Learner school, and also has a French immersion program.

Jane

The second participant who will be called Jane is of probable Scandinavian heritage but born and raised in a farm community in Alberta. She was the youngest out of three girls born in her family. In a time when as Jane recalls "girls were raised to be either teachers or nurses". Jane's sisters, 10 and 11 years her senior, respectively became a teacher and a nurse. Besides English, which is her first language, she also speaks French. Jane has a wide range of teaching experience, spending a lot of time teaching abroad as well as in Canada. She taught junior high and high school on and off, and most recently, she became an instructor teaching post-secondary courses to student-teachers. Jane is the most experienced teacher in our group as she has been teaching for over 30 years. She has also diversified her teaching experience by teaching English as a Second Language at both evening classes and abroad.

I also asked Jane what made her decide to become a teacher. She shared a very interesting story. One of her sisters was a teacher in the Canadian Arctic, working with isolated Inuit communities. Her sister, who was ten years older than Jane, would come home from time to time and share some of her interesting and innovating teaching experiences. Inspired by her sister, Jane felt that becoming a teacher was a natural way to go. Jane recalls that at the age of only 21 years old, she got her teaching degree. When I asked her if Jane thought 'teachers were born teachers', she disagreed. She said there are other factors, hinting at experiences as in her case, even if she also says "for some people it seems just a little easier" to become a teacher. Jane has worked in many schools, but she mentioned that they were predominantly diverse and large, averaging 700 students.

Anna

Anna is a second generation Canadian, born and raised in Canada of Chinese heritage. She is in her thirties and besides English, she speaks Cantonese and Mandarin. Anna has been teaching English language arts to high school students for about ten years. She mentions that all the schools she has worked had a very diverse student population. When asked why she decided to become a teacher, she said the main reason was her experience while a student in high school taking on leadership roles. She realized she enjoyed working with people and this fact influenced her decision to become a teacher. However, Anna also says that she only started thinking of pursuing a career in education and becoming a teacher when she started tutoring mathematics and her students started to compliment her on her teaching skills. Anna works at a typical urban school, with a population of over 2,500 diverse students speaking 62 native languages other than English or French.

Jocelyn

Jocelyn, our fourth participant considers herself as a clear example of the 'average Canadian teacher'. She is of probable English and Finnish heritage, born in a middle-class family and raised in a small town in Alberta. Jocelyn is in her 30s and does not speak a second language. Jocelyn has been teaching English language arts, mostly, and junior high for about eight years. She says that in her first year of teaching, she worked at a school where the students were largely of European descent and high socioeconomic status. However, when she moved into a different school, the student demographic was quite different as the students were comprised of a much more culturally and socioeconomic diverse population.

According to Jocelyn the fact that both of her parents were dedicated and passionate teachers as well as her experience working with youth camps after high school, probably influenced her choice of becoming a teacher. Jocelyn's school has over 600 students and is very

diverse, mainly, South Asians, Africans, Middle Eastern, First Nations and Canadian students of European descent. At the time of this data collection, Jocelyn was in the process of transitioning into a new school, which she remarked consisted predominantly of First Nations students.

Data Collection

The study used the following qualitative methods to collect data: A background questionnaire, an individual interview, and a focus-group meeting that included all four participants and the researcher. These three different methods of obtaining information were essential as they provided both rich and relevant data (Yin, 1989). The background questionnaire was important as it gave me a better understanding of the individual and unique details of the participants' life experiences such as where they grew up and their personal journey to become a teacher. The interviews were quite effective as Denzin and Lincoln (2003) argue that an interview is a dialogue between the interviewer who not only asks questions but carefully listens to the answers of the interviewee. Such conversation is not unbiased as it might be "influenced by the interviewer, including race, class, ethnicity and gender (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003, p. 48). Another qualitative method used in this study was a focus-group meeting, which was an important qualitative tool as it promoted engaging interactions and "reduce[d] the distance between the researcher and the researched" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003 p. 57). The focus group meeting had an exploratory purpose and was used combined with other qualitative information gathering tools (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). As Sherman and Webb (1988) argue qualitative research "implies a direct concern with experience as it is lived or felt or undergone" (as cited in Merriam, 1998, p. 6).

Therefore, having chosen a qualitative approach in this study was quite an important step as it offered a wide range of perspectives on how to look at the data, including sociocultural and

linguistic viewpoints. A further explanation of how the three qualitative methods were implemented throughout the research follows:

Questionnaires

The individual questionnaire was emailed to all four teachers individually after they signed the consent papers agreeing to participate in this study. The four teachers typed their responses and emailed me back the questionnaire. The purpose of the questionnaire was to gain some initial knowledge of the participants' background. The questions were semi-structured and later used to guide further questions as the research progressed as well as supporting data. The answers varied in length and details: Some were longer and provided expanded details, while others had a more direct tone and were shorter. A sample of the background questionnaire questions follows:

1. How long have you been teaching and which age group?
2. Where did you grow up?
3. How many languages do you speak? Is English your home language?
4. Where did you complete your teacher education?
5. Which schools have you taught in and which grade levels?
6. How diverse were/are the student and teacher populations in these schools?
7. Have you encountered any challenges in addressing questions of diversity in your teaching?
If so, please explain.
8. Have you heard about the work of Paulo Freire in education? If yes, could you share your ideas about his work?

Interviews

The interviews were performed individually with each of the four participants. Three

participants were interviewed online, via Skype and, one was interviewed in person at a convenient location. All four interviews were digitally audio-recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. The interviews were between 30 to 45 minutes long and had a semi-structured question format. These semi-structured questions were purposely used to further learn about the educators' pedagogical experiences, education and perspectives on their professional growth in the context of the growing diversity in the classrooms. It is important to mention that the prior teachers' responses in the individual background questionnaire were used as a baseline to formulate the individual interview questions. During the interviews, I also took some notes highlighting the main themes emerging as the conversation unfolded. To verify the accuracy of my notes and/or add to them, in the interview I restated my 'theme findings' after the interview with the participant.

Although, as I mentioned the questions were malleable and might look slightly different from participant to participant, here are the baseline questions I used during the individual interviews:

1. Which experiences influenced your decision to become a teacher?
2. How different is your perceptions of experience as a teacher-student and now as a practicing teacher?
3. How do you see 'diversity' in education?
4. How do you think teacher professional development programs approach the classroom reality?
5. What was the main reason you decided to be part of this study?
6. Do you feel you were prepared to address issues of diversity in your teacher preparation (e.g. In relation to cultural, racial, linguistic, religious, gender diversity and so forth)?
7. What kinds of professional development have you been engaged in?

8. What did you feel you gained from them?

9. Do you have an idea of the kind of professional development you would like to be involved in?

Focus group

The focus group meeting included all four participants, who met at a commonly agreed location in one of the major cities in Alberta, at the end of a school working day. The meeting lasted for two and a half hours, longer than the anticipated two hours. As questions were asked, teachers quickly engaged, and themes started to emerge and develop. The conversational responses among the participants were digitally audio-recorded and later transcribed. As I had done in previous interviews, I also took notes emphasizing the themes emerging and insights offered. Later, I briefly reviewed my notes with the participants to determine whether or not I had the correct information.

Litosseliti (2003) suggests that one of the main advantages of focus groups is that they present a "natural environment, which produces a range of opinions, ideas, and experiences, and thus generate insightful information" (p. 2). The focus group discussion lasted longer than planned and was exceptionally productive, making it unnecessary to have a second meeting. The participants' perspectives on the subjects brought up by the researcher generated an interesting and rich discussion. The discussion turned out to be both broad and diverse, going beyond the questions I had planned to ask. It seemed that with each question raised, a new theme would emerge and generate further discussion that would last until the topic was exhausted. Here are some of the questions I used to trigger a dialogue among the participant-teachers:

1. How has teacher education contributed to your practice?
2. How do you perceive teacher professional development programs in relation to daily

experiences you have in your classroom? Professional development experiences you have found unhelpful in your teaching practice, and PD experiences that have benefited your teaching, particularly for diverse classrooms.

3. How do you perceive teacher experience and student experience through the lens of professional development?
4. We talk a lot about diverse classrooms and how to integrate the students' experiences in their continuing learning process, how do you see this happening when comes to teachers?
5. Do you think teachers' perceived experiences and knowledge are validated through teacher hiring processes?
6. How do you feel professional development can validate teachers' perceived experiences?
7. When comes to 'teacher learning' academic literature, how inclusive research has been to teachers' knowledge validation/recognition?
8. Some might say that Alberta is a very conservative province. Do you think Edmonton for being a very diverse city; has a more open-minded perspective in teacher education? And how does it translate or not in professional development programs.
9. What you say the difference is between more local (school) professional development compared to the more broadening (province/city wide) professional development programs? Is the message the same?
10. Putting it in global perspective, how do you see professional development programs contribution to create a more fair, inclusive and compassionate education?
11. If you would be in charge of designing a professional development program, how would it look like?

I also asked teachers if they thought their experiences were being validated through

hiring policies. I inquired of teachers about whether professional development was validating their experiences as well as how inclusive of teachers' knowledge research literature has been and how teachers see larger (city wide) versus smaller (school wide) professional development initiatives. We discussed emergent topics such as hiring practices, effective teacher preparation programs to better prepare teachers for the reality of these socioeconomically and culturally diverse classrooms in Alberta. And finally, the influence of the business model of education and the attempts of official standardization through educational initiatives and policies in education.

Data Analysis

As has been previously stated, the data in this study was collected through a background questionnaire, an individual interview, and a focus-group meeting with all four participants. After all the information was gathered, the data was transcribed, reviewed and coded. The data analysis was influenced by Yin (1994) as well as Miles and Huberman (1994), who similarly, suggest a series of steps to analyze a case study data. Atkinson (2002) argues that this process involves "logically linking the data to a series of propositions and then interpreting the subsequent information" (p.1). Atkinson (2002) explains that:

Such propositions can be derived from the research questions or from interpreting data from other sources including from the literature and/or surveys. The propositions are used in two ways to guide the development of the case studies. First, they greatly assisted in the formulation of the case study questions and second, they serve as the basis for creation of the initial codes for use during the analysis of the case study data. (pp. 1-2)

The propositions or information in this study came from the responses to the semi-structured questions during the research through the various already mentioned qualitative sources. Such information was codified and separated into common themes found among the

participants' offered propositions. I used what Atkinson (2002) described as "Codes and Coding technique", I connected "the data back to the research questions and the propositions" (p. 2). This process of data analysis was originally suggested by Miles and Huberman (1994), and Atkinson (2002) explains that:

The process involves creating codes to be used for the analysis of the case study data and then coding the data. Codes are tags or labels that assign units of meaning to the data and for the quick identification of the segments relating to the research questions and any potential themes. The identification of these segments is facilitated by the creation of meta-matrices to assemble descriptive data from the different cases into a standard format. (p. 2)

Essentially, the data is condensed together allowing for comparisons to be made. Once the segments are identified the analysis of the case study data can be considered more straightforward (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

In this multiple case study, I used a handmade wallmapping tool, which consisted of a large piece of brown paper and color assorted dot stickers used as data content labels, to have a better visual understanding of the data emerging from the multiple cases. I compressed all the information together using this visual 'wallmap' and labeling the data, to facilitate the comparisons and help to find common emerging themes (Atkinson, 2002; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

The data was analyzed, mostly, linearly but also following an unrestricted time-line due to the nature of narratives (conversations), where one may refer to the same theme more than once, at different times during an interview process (Constas, 1992; Padula & Miller, 1999). During this stage the data was managed in a flexible way: Changes were made, pieces were

added as well as parts were deleted. Similarly to Padula and Miller's study (1999), multiple case study involving the experiences of university returning female women, where the extensive data was transcribed, closely examined and labeled, the emerged themes were "named using the participants' words and researcher's interpretation" (p. 332). The data was organized into the wall-map in the form of generated themes. These emerged themes were reviewed by the participants during the research process and later by a colleague (peer review). The next step was to analyze the information provided in the visual wall-map tool in order to generate a discussion on the emerged themes in relation to the literature review. Finally, I looked for a theory emerging from the data.

Limitations

The data provided by the four participants was extensively rich and diverse, and its validity comes from the accurate account of the shared lived experiences of these four Alberta teachers teaching in diverse contexts represented in the findings.

The study, however, is limited in the sense that it would have benefited by including some principals as participants, as principals are primarily teachers who have moved into administrative roles. It would have been interesting to investigate how the new role as administrators would impact the former teachers' perceptions of professional growth. I also would have wished to have had other teachers who are members of minority groups such as teachers from an indigenous background as well as male teachers. Even though, the study sought to include such samples, no male teachers or teachers from an indigenous background applied or agreed to participate in the study. Therefore, this study is unintentionally single-gendered as all participants are female teachers which, to a certain extent, brings a gender lens into this research. It is important to point out that the study is unable to say whether or not having had male teacher

participants, who are commonly found teaching disciplines such as math and physical education or confined to administrative roles, would have added different thoughts or ideas of their perceptions of experiences in education to this study.

The study is also limited in its geographical reach as it only focuses in the experiences of teachers in one of the major cities in Alberta. In the future, it could be expanded to teachers from other provinces in Canada, from both urban areas and rural communities as well as from indigenous reserves.

Ethical Considerations

Researcher bias

The first point, which I think, is important to address in the ethical consideration is the researcher's own biases concerning this research. I, the researcher, share many characteristics with the participants in this study, as I am also a female teacher who returned to university to pursue a graduate education at an Alberta educational institution. Another important characteristic of the researcher, which is intrinsically related to diversity, is that I am a new immigrant to Canada, who finished my teacher preparation in a culturally and linguistically different Latin American country and have taught in Alberta schools as well as abroad. I also speak two other languages in addition to English.

I wisely used my declared biases as an asset in this study as I do not think I would be able to understand what the real perceptions of the experiences of these teachers are if I were not one of them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). How could one understand and accurately write a paper on experiences and perspectives of those teaching, without being directly involved in the classroom? As a student-teacher nothing prepared me, for example, to teach a class of 28 highly academically, linguistically, culturally, mentally diverse students, in addition to all the other

demands of teaching such as attending meetings, participating in professional development initiatives and collaborating with peers. But again, I had to consider that the topic could also be too close to my own experiences and cloud my judgment. I used these opportunities to reflect on such possibility by searching for available current theoretical literature to organize my thoughts as I interpreted the data.

As a researcher, it was important to me to let the data speak (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). One of the ways I 'gave voice' to these four Alberta teachers was by including some of the participants' relevant direct quotations to support my interpretations. Thus, a sense of awareness of the importance of the participants' actual expressed views on issues these teachers found relevant in education was a central point in the interpretation of the data.

Overall, I agree that, ideally, the researcher should be unbiased when interpreting the data, as the 'data should speak for itself' but there is also merit to researchers' confessions, which "are very valuable because they make readers aware of the complex and cumbersome nature of interviewing people in their natural settings and lend a tone of realism and veracity to studies" (Denzin & Lincoln, 1988, p. 140). Namely, the researcher's biases should be considered not as a limitation but part of the process of doing research.

Additional ethical considerations

All research initiatives have their benefits and risks. In research studies, ethical concerns of representation differ in nature, but all studies are potentially subject to ethical problems (Orb, Eisenhauer, & Wynaden, 2000). Different methods and approaches such as the one used in this multiple case study, are not an exception to ethical challenges.

In case study, the researcher gives voice to each participant and, organizes such information into themes to develop the participant's narrative or story. But there is a risk that in

the process of retelling a story, the researcher's biases could compromise the story's authenticity. This issue was kept in mind during writing the results in this study. As it was, fundamentally, important for the researcher after the data had been collected, to be aware that this is the participants' information and the results of the study should, primarily, reflect the participant's accounts and perspectives (Creswell, 2012). It is also part of the researcher's responsibility, to a certain extent, to foresee the possible results of a study not only in terms of benefits but also pitfalls, and disclose its risks to the participants (Creswell, 2012; Streubert & Carpenter, 1999). Happily, Canada is a democratic society and most teachers generally feel comfortable sharing their views without any professional danger such as losing their jobs, as might occur in some other countries.

In order to maintain the participants' anonymity, I used an informed consent approach explaining the purpose and the risks of the study in the form of a disclosure that was acknowledged and signed by each participant. The consent also guaranteed the participants' confidential information such as a non-disclosure of their identities and the use of pseudonym names. In addition, the study went through a formal ethics approval process at the University of Alberta.

In this context, two of my main ethical concerns regarded the informed consent and its relationship with the participants' awareness and responsibilities, making sure that the participants would not only provide valuable information for the study but also potentially benefit from its outcomes as the results of this study could possibly be used to further inform future educational policies and/or professional development initiatives (Creswell, 2012).

Overall, regarding the participants, while it is challenging to foresee all the potential ethical issues, which might emerge from a study, a researcher's sense of ethical responsibility

and awareness of the participants' ownership of the voices portrayed in the study outcomes are, definitely, important to guide better choices in methods and how the study is approached and interpreted. These research concerns were factored responsibly in this study to the best of my ability.

Verification Strategies

In qualitative studies, there is always a concern on data validation (Creswell, 2012; Padula & Miller, 1999). As in Padula and Miller's study, the researcher shared a lot of similar characteristics with the participants such as she was a female-returned graduate student, who took a time hiatus to pursue a career in teaching as well as to raise a family. Being aware of the closeness of the subject to my own experiences, I mostly counter-balanced my interpretation by relying on the participants' data and the literature available on the themes that emerged during the study. Despite the fact that sharing common knowledge and possible experiences with the participants could be troubling, such shared features were, to a certain degree, an asset to better understand and describe the socioeducational context and events in the lives of these teachers (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Padula & Miller, 1999). I also used multiple sources to collect data as well as different methods of data collection (Creswell, 2012).

In addition, I verified some aspects of the data with the participants after the interviews. I also included chunks of the data collected, using the participants' own words to support my interpretation. Lastly, I reflected on my biases as a teacher and a graduate student as I thought and wrote.

Chapter 4: Results

Overview

This chapter addresses the perspectives and the perceptions of their experiences of the four high school English language arts teachers we shall call Anna, Jane, Maria and Jocelyn. These teachers tell their perceptions of their experiences concerning and their perspectives on diversity in the classrooms and schools. They also share their views of the official provincial response to the increasingly diverse student population. And finally, the four high school teachers discuss their perspectives on their own professional growth.

Themes

Three main themes emerged from the individual cases as well as collective interactions among these four high school teachers and the researcher. The first one is related to the experiences and perceptions of teachers in the face of the growing diversity in the classrooms and in schools. Secondly, the 'official' response to such increasing student diversity, and lastly the teachers' current complex needs and aspirations in terms of professional growth.

(1) Teachers' perceptions of their experiences and perceptions of diversity in classrooms and schools.

The first theme is diversity in the classrooms and schools. This theme emerged out of conversations on how teachers perceived diversity in their teaching contexts. The data shows that teachers' perceptions of diversity which go beyond the issues of race and socioeconomic interactions involving teachers and students. The topic is sub-divided into parts and some emerging sub-topics as follows:

1.1 *Perceptions of student diversity*

Diversity in schools refers mainly to student diversity, and its problematization in the

classroom. This topic is quite rich in terms of the variety of views and understandings of student diversity.

Overall, the teachers say that there has been an excessive focus on student diversity and how to attend to the visible diverse students' needs such as English language learning and cultural accommodations. Maria, for instance, speaks about the opportunities students have to validate their cultural backgrounds in schools:

But there is more recognition of students' [diversity], with all this idea of bringing their [students'] background knowledge as significant, in respect of how you teach [for example] literature. And there is more diversity recognition among students even in the school culture, through some events that are recognizing culture diversity. (extract from the focus group)

Jocelyn suggests that diversity is mainly connected with the socioeconomic status of students:

There is an embedded understanding that students who are impoverished are probably the Somalia kids, and the aboriginal kids. So, you talk about diversity while talking about socioeconomic factors as opposed to diversity by itself. (extract from the focus group)

Their remarks suggest education mainly focuses on student diversity through multicultural mechanisms (Silverman, 2010). For instance, teachers are encouraged to consider student backgrounds when teaching and schools often acknowledge students' heritage through celebratory cultural events. However, some aspects of these students' diverse background recognition are still in-line with multicultural views embedded in the understanding of diversity associated with the students' socioeconomic assumed status of poverty and ethnicity. These socioeconomic assumptions, often, enforce Canadian mainstream stereotypes commonly

attributed to Indigenous students and students from certain non-Western countries such as Somalia, who are not only dark-skinned students, but also often come from a refugee family background. Another teacher, Jane, is clear that diversity is a very complicated topic:

There're so many wrinkles and issues that come up, and so many unconscious biases and prejudices, and racism and sexism that come up as soon as you start to deal with diversity in education. (extract from Jane's individual interview)

Jane goes on to talk about the extent of bias, prejudices, racism and sexism subjected by the diverse population as well as other minority groups:

It is a little bit of a challenge teaching about diversity in education, multicultural perspectives, and the whole history of Indigenous experiences in Canada, and how that affects our students, not only our Aboriginal students but all of them. (extract from Jane's individual interview)

Jane continues to share her views on diversity by mentioning her experience teaching a post-secondary course on diversity. Her students struggled with their pre-conceived assumptions of what diversity is, and who is part of it and who is not. She highlights that for example, minority local groups such as indigenous peoples were not easily perceived or even considered as part of the large spectrum of Canadian diversity by some of her student-teachers. Here is what she has to say about this experience:

And then, we have students [her post-secondary students] giving a lot of push backs, apparently on this [considering indigenous peoples as part of the large spectrum of diversity]. Some of them with the idea that 'there isn't enough' diversity out there that we only pay attention to the experiences of aboriginal Canadians. And what about other multicultural perspectives and so forth? So, they are not getting this sense that 'yes'

because the very unique experiences which our, specifically, aboriginal peoples have gone through, is quite different from people from other countries who came here as settlers. (extract from Jane's individual interview)

For Jane, diversity is a complex issue as it involves many aspects of sensitive topics like gender prejudices based on historical and cultural assumptions, generalization and biases of race, especially among minority groups. This limited way to see diversity impacts the way we perceive one another and the relationships we develop over time. This might also explain why multiculturalism perspectives permeate some administrative policies towards diversity and often embedded in teaching practices, leading us to believe that education has been implementing multicultural education as if the two words, diversity and multiculturalism, were synonymous; unaware that there is a significant difference between diversity and multiculturalism (Silverman, 2010; Guess, 2006). As Maria explains that schools are more likely to acknowledge diversity among students, however, such diversity is often recognized through events and through the lens of cultural differences. She argues that there is more recognition of students' diversity, regardless of "whether this is part of multiculturalism or is part of diversity" (extract from focus group).

Maria thinks that "there is a difference between multiculturalism and diversity" as she explains the difference by saying that 'knowing' and 'experiencing' diversity are two different things, and that some teachers might have 'known' diversity but that does not necessarily mean that they have interacted with diversity enough to gain an understanding of it (extract from focus group). According to Maria, diversity is "taken for granted" in Canadian schools (extract from focus group). Maria argues that 'knowing' about diversity is widely assumed in Canada, and not questioned or considered an issue. Namely, it is generally assumed that Canadian teachers are familiar with diversity as they grew up in a society with different cultural groups. Such

assumption is more aligned with multicultural views of distinguishing differences by cultural background as opposed to universal differences among people, which includes visible differences such as culture and race as well as invisible differences such as identity and mental health challenges (Guess, 2006; Silverman, 2010). Maria observed that in more diverse school contexts, students do not seem to pay much attention to visible diversity among themselves, despite the fact that most of these students are culturally and racially different. Thus, Maria says that "in terms of students, I [she] don't know, whether they [students] are even aware of the fact that there is such thing as diversity" (extract from the focus group).

Our participants suggest there are many more opportunities of recognition of students' diversity as opposed to teachers' diversity in Alberta schools. As Anna observed that in the schools she worked, for example, the students' diversity was clearly recognized through events such as anti-bullying campaigns:

Our [her] school had, I wouldn't say diverse opportunities for teachers, maybe more for students, because we did have anti-bullying day and kind of pulled... [Interruption].

(extract from the focus group)

Jane interrupts Anna to emphatically clarify that this kind of event is only for students.

Anna agrees that such events are focused on student diversity:

it's for students [and] not for teachers. But she also adds that this kind of event is somehow limited, however, to a certain extent beneficial to students because it allows them to see the diversity in each other but nothing beyond that. (extract from the focus group)

In terms of teachers' perceptions and understandings of student diversity, three out of the four participants offer some insights based on both or either lived experiences and what they

have observed in Canadian schools. Jocelyn suggests that often teachers fail to come to terms or to purposely understand student diversity. She argues that the curriculum and whole educational structure "reflect the culturally white establishment" (extract from Jocelyn's individual interview), which has been in place since the beginning of public schools in Canada. And it most likely, contributes to the fact that teachers do not seem to engage in much of the student diversity seen in their classrooms. As Jocelyn points to the fact that most students are culturally and ethnically different as the whole educational structure is Eurocentric:

I [Jocelyn] worked at a school where most of the students were immigrants: Muslims, Sikhs, Etc. There were teachers that had worked there for years, and [they] knew nothing about them [students]. They didn't even know that there was a difference between Muslims and Sikhs. I guess, they didn't have to, because even if the student body is diverse, the whole structure is white, the curriculum and education is still, I guess, entrenched. (extract from Jocelyn's individual interview)

Anna tells us how she manages diversity in her classroom. She says that as an English language art teacher, she tries to be aware of the many complex aspects of diversity entrenched in literature texts that might affect her students, not only in terms of culture, but also personal experiences:

[In the] classroom, you have to be sensitive to different opinions. With [English] language arts, specifically, we have classroom discussions. And so, the most important is to say that it is good to have the environment for students to speak in a respectful manner. Well, [while] being very much aware that everyone has very different opinions, because they also have very different experiences, and we might agree to disagree, but the school is a safe place to talk those things out. I try my best to diversify the text that I teach too,

so they [students] have a taste of different perspectives, different cultures, different languages. (extract from the focus group)

Maria talks about the English monoculture present in high school English language arts curriculum as it does not reflect the diversity of the world English literature, but privileges the British settlers' heritage by, mainly, prioritizing English texts such as Shakespeare:

What I consider a challenge is the teaching of Shakespeare. I don't agree with the justifications for making him the only author mandated on the English language arts high school curriculum. I would also like to see more world literature taught in the regular classroom. (extract from Maria's individual questionnaire)

And finally, Anna points to two important aspects that may influence teachers' perceptions and understandings of diversity, regardless of their background. She suggests that one aspect is the different environments in which teachers grew up, whether they were more culturally segregated environments such as small towns or rural areas as opposed to larger urban centers, which often would offer more opportunities for these teachers to interact with a wide range of people and cultures. Anna explains that growing up in a large urban center, she was not strange to students from different cultural backgrounds, learning needs and, more importantly, diverse worldviews. Secondly, Anna points to the important role that teacher preparation potentially has in helping student-teachers to further understand diversity beyond cultural, ethnic and socioeconomic factors. Anna suggests the need to reflect on what diversity is and how it can be incorporated in the classroom:

We will get students with all sorts of needs in our class, and we need to make sure we are cognoscente of their needs. So, we have to constantly modify the programs to make sure they[students] can be successful. So, that's one thing that prepared me well in the teacher

training program, but also, growing up in a large urban center. It [diversity] is something I am used to, because all my classes, my classmates were very diverse, [in a] diverse [school] environment. So, it doesn't surprise me that people have different opinions.

(extract from Anna's individual interview)

In conclusion, Jocelyn, Maria and Jane suggest that diversity in schools is often associated with one or more of the following factors: ethnicity, culture, language and low socio-economic status. Anna however, defines diversity as "the different voices that compose your [her] classroom that you have to be sensitive to different opinions" (extract from Anna's individual interviews). Besides growing up in an urban center, Anna also says that during her teacher preparation, she took a course on inclusion, which approached diversity from the perspective that students have different learning needs, making her aware that, as a teacher, she should adapt her teaching to attend such students' needs and shape her views on what diversity means in the Alberta schools context.

1.2 Perceptions of teacher diversity

The second common theme that the teachers in this study commented on was the [mis]understanding of how diversity is perceived by education and the implications of such [mis]understanding reflected in educational policies, administrative decisions and how teachers are portrayed in the context of diversity. This common theme branched out and generated a broad discussion, which led to other important issues pertaining to education that impacted these teachers such as hiring practices.

As a starting point, these four Alberta teachers agree that most teachers are still not as ethnically, culturally and socioeconomically diverse as the student population. It is undeniable that the majority of Canadian teachers are still of European origin or what is commonly referred

to as simply 'white', but that does not mean that these teachers are not diverse as they have different lived experiences what set them apart. Such unique experiences are important differential components in the large spectrum of understandings of diversity, as a human phenomenon not limited to race, culture and/or other restraining factors such as age. As Jocelyn questions why there is recognition of diversity among students but often not among teachers, by implying that teachers do not stop being diverse when we turn 18 years old. These four practitioners' personal and professional journeys in education, described in different occasions in this study show the relevance of these educators unique lived experiences and how it influenced their understandings of diversity in the classrooms in Alberta.

The data indicates that there are many assumptions perceived in the different attempts to portray Canadian teachers in education, from the way they should look to what and how much they know about diversity. Although, the majority of teachers are still considered as a group of people in education characterized simply as 'whites', teachers' responses in this study point to a wide diversity of knowledge, educational perspectives and backgrounds among Alberta educators.

I observed that even the two Canadian-born European descent teachers, Jane and Jocelyn, who shared some visibly ethnic and cultural similarities, had different experiences with diversity contextualized in their ethnic backgrounds, growing up environment, and in their later interactions as they pursued a teaching career, which possibly influenced their understanding of diversity. For instance, Jane grew up in a farm community, her last name suggests Danish-Norwegian heritage, speaks a second language, and has traveled and taught abroad. She was trained and has been teaching for over 30 years. As opposed to Jocelyn, who sees herself as the 'typical' Alberta teacher, meaning she has an English heritage, grew up in a middle-class small-

town community speaking only English, whose parents are also teachers.

In the case of Maria and Anna, they could be considered visibly diverse teachers, however, their lived experiences regarding diversity are quite different. Maria is the only Canadian teacher born abroad in this study. Apart from her foreign accent, she is part of the visibly 'white' teachers from an Eastern European background. She grew up in a mostly homogenous European society and had been mostly alien to accentuated cultural differences until she moved to Canada. Interestingly, Anna does not indicate that being part of a visible minority of Canadian-born Asian descent teachers was the main factor on shaping her understanding of what diversity is. Instead, she suggests that growing up in an urban center and seeing diversity as a complex set of 'visible' and 'invisible' differences dwelling in schools, helped her to factor such diversity in her pedagogical practice as she became a teacher. In contrast to Anna's experiences, Jocelyn, who grew up in a small community with little cultural diversity, defines herself as what she perceives to be an 'average Canadian teacher'. She may make a reference to the fact that Canadian teachers are commonly described simply as 'female, middle class and white'. Jocelyn says that "I[*she*] think[s] in terms of teacher diversity, school diversity is still pretty [*pauses*]. You know, overall, I don't know if hegemony is the right word, but we are a white dominant society" (extract from Jocelyn's individual interview).

In their own words, some of the participants share their views on how their understanding of diversity developed over time. Jane reflects on her lived experiences growing up in a farm community North of Edmonton, and going to school in an area with not much cultural diversity:

I [*she*] think that what you are saying makes me think that it [*diversity*] is assumed. It is assumed, they [*teachers*] deal with this at the student level. That what we are taught in Social Studies through school is a part of our Canadian multiculturalism heritage, and it's

assumed values, that by the time you become an adult and you reach a career like teaching, it is assumed that these [values] are already embodied and don't need to be instructed. What is not necessarily a valid assumption, but I think... [pause] I've never thought about it until you said it. But I think that there is the assumption that [teachers know diversity]. (extract from the focus group)

Jane also suggests that her lived experiences as well as her world travels helped her to develop an appreciation for diversity:

I[*she*] grew up here, in Alberta, in a farm not too far from Edmonton. It is about a thirty-minute drive from a town where my mom now lives, in a lodge at the farm where I was at. So, I actually live very close to home. Now, being [*living*] here in Edmonton, although, I have travelled a lot around the world. (extract from the focus group)

Maria explains that her former students, prior to moving to Canada, were very culturally homogenous and, diversity was not a familiar topic to her until she immigrated here. Regarding her lived experiences in Canada, especially in the early years, Maria thinks that there is not much diversity among Canadian teachers, despite the fact that Canadian students are visibly much more diverse than the Bulgarian ones:

There is an expectation coming to the classroom and being a teacher [*in Canada*]. You kind of succumb or [*are*] subordinated to a particular kind of impression of what a Canadian teacher is. So, in looking around, I started a number of years ago, here [*at the University of Alberta, taking courses to obtain a Canadian teacher certification*] actually coming from Bulgaria. [*In Canada*] There was not diversity among teachers in the classroom. And what had to happen, as I said, my personal training as an educator [*in Bulgaria*] at one point became irrelevant, because I had to be a Canadian teacher. (extract

from the focus group)

Maria recalls that her teaching experience and training in Bulgaria became obsolete in Canada, as Canadian perspectives on education sought to shape or to mold Canadian teachers' skill sets and personal traits into a more homogeneous and particular patterns used to define or underline what makes a Canadian teacher, a good teacher:

There was not, - 'ok, you are bringing something that is from a different perspective'. - No, you have to be molded in that particular frame that is in place [in Canada]. Including [pauses], I still remember how choked I was that one of my qualities was a [pause] that I sat on the evaluation 'how well I can joke', 'what is my sense humor'. I was just - ok, I didn't know that about myself! That I had to be someone who's joking all the time or that's part of my professional description. (extract from the focus group)

Regarding her perceptions of teacher diversity in Canadian schools, Maria says that there is not much recognition for individual aspects of diversity such as the lived experiences of teachers and how that impacts their pedagogy and their own understanding, specifically, where they stand in the context of diversity. Maria, clearly, points to insufficient recognition that Canadian teachers are diverse in many aspects, and such diversity influences their practice:

When we are talking about diversity in respect of teachers. I don't think there is much of an acknowledgement that teachers themselves could have different backgrounds, and different experiences, and make that a part of the classroom experience. (extract from the focus group)

Building on Maria's comments on how diversity among teachers seem to be often perceived in schools, Anna implies that although, there seems to be more recognition for students' diverse needs in schools, similarly to what Maria suggests to happens to teachers,

students also go through a 'cookie cutter' molding in the form of curriculum, which privileges the Anglo-Canadian understanding of what cultural knowhow should be continually assimilated through the choices of required teaching materials. Anna mentions that this Anglo-Canadian assimilation can be seen, for example, in the curriculum prioritization of British texts such as Shakespeare. Anna seems to imply that the recognition of diversity among students is done on a superficial level as it often disregards the diversity in the students' lived experiences:

Your comments about needing to become a Canadian teacher, right! Maybe, it's part of how... I don't know how to articulate this [short pauses], but the lack of diversity among students to a certain extent, certainly, I don't know [pause] to a certain extent is implied that it doesn't matter where they [students] are coming from, they need to learn this [the same] curriculum. They are now a student in our Alberta classroom. They [students] are going to learn Shakespeare, or whatever it is, right? I don't know, I think it is part of it [the problem]. (extract from the focus group)

Despite the lack of its recognition in the school context, Anna restates that teachers are quite diverse in their lived experiences and perspectives in education, regardless of their ethnic and cultural background:

I think that just by listening to the experiences of different teachers is interesting. What we all do, or what we think, or we do the same. But we might feel that how we feel about the job might be very different, based on our classroom context, our experiences, and what we teach. So even though, we have a very standard structured day, there are all these little things that all happen in one day, that kind of makes us who we are, and [I'm] fascinated by how people see this job. (extract from the focus group)

Overall, these remarks suggest that teachers, regardless of being mostly visibly 'white',

and whether or not they have some cultural similarities, they are often diverse in their experiences. The assumptions that shape the construct of an abstract image of how a Canadian teacher is perceived in education led to further development of this topic.

1.3 Perceptions of hiring practices in the context of increased diversity

To my surprise hiring practices emerged as an important sub-theme on teachers' remarks concerning their perception of teachers' experiences. The participants share their perceived experiences when they were first hired as teachers as well as their views on the many factors involving the teacher hiring process. Anna seems to suggest that her visible cultural background as an Asian-Canadian teacher job seeker did not influence her being first hired. She believes she had the 'right' professional qualifications, and most likely, personality traits required for the teaching position she applied for. However, she admits that often such a process is facilitated by networking. That is to say, you will be hired as a result of a reference given by someone in the field that knows you. Anna shares her, mostly, uncommon hiring experience:

I was just thinking about my first job, and it was all random. I called the district that day, and they had an opening and I [pause], anyway, sorry [for contradicting the opinion or hiring experiences of other teachers]! I will definitely say that knowing someone would help in this profession. Because most often when a new person is hired, there is [pause], they have a certain kind of connection to someone who is already in that school. (extract from the focus group)

Following Anna's comments, Jocelyn adds that, often, the teaching hiring process is mostly a random process, based on either luck of 'being in the right place at the right time' or the recruiter, who is in charge of your professional file at the headquarters' office, and responsible for sending you out for prospective teaching interviews. Jocelyn suggests that teacher hiring

processes are, often, based on 'luck' or by chance, as she explains:

No [it doesn't validate experience], I think that the hiring process values the luck of the draw. Have you called your consultant? And who is that? You know, what I mean?

(extract from the focus group)

However, Jocelyn also shares Anna's opinions that sometimes teacher hiring takes place on a professional merit basis. In addition, she seems to suggest that the lack of visible diversity among teachers might be because Alberta might have a shortage of education-wise, culturally or even gender qualified diverse teachers on the market for principals to choose from. Jocelyn argues that, sometimes, being a visible diverse teacher might be an asset to the teacher applying for a teaching position:

I think, there is a lack of diversity among teachers. And that is, I think, this is not a permanent action[pause], kind of influence[pause], but just the idea that we don't have any men in this school, and that we need more men, and we don't have them. [Or]You are the First Nations teacher who applies [in a school for a teaching position]. My God! We'd love to have you. But you know, what I mean? So, in some cases diversity can work in your favor over experience as well. (extract from the focus group)

Maria, an immigrant teacher herself, had a different opinion talking about her hiring experience. Maria argues that knowing someone in the school system who knew her, was key for her being hired as a teacher:

I had people who really wanted me to be part of that department. I had a wonderful department head who saw what I could bring into the classroom. So, I was very lucky that way that I had someone who sort of got me under her wing and advocated for me. Had I not had that person, I would have been doing something else. (extract from the

focus group)

Interestingly, Maria also talked about the Canadian teacher model imposed on new hired teachers, especially in her case as a teacher born and trained outside of Canada, which disregards teachers' diverse lived experiences. She argues that such model resembles a 'cookie cutter', which is used to make sure all teachers follow a certain pattern of professional and often personal expectations.

But that hasn't been my experience because I had to forget the things I've learned in Bulgaria because this system wanted me to be a particular [kind of] teacher. And even now, some of my colleagues who are on probationary contracts and they are being observed by administration, and the things they have to do in order to be approved, are like sort of a check list: Do you fit the profile? It's become even more narrow, and hard to fit into the mold, and even more it's like a cookie cutter almost. (extract from the focus group)

Jane adds another interesting perspective on teacher hiring processes as she talks about certain assumed professional traits, which are often considered helpful such as 'teaching experience', especially by beginning teachers, can become a career obstacle or burden as teachers grow more mature and experienced, and go back on the market applying for a new teaching position. In addition to other aspects such as higher pay due to an accumulated teaching pay scale, Jane also argues that such teachers might be perceived by administrators as someone who would not succumb to 'the molding model' of education, as their experience might have helped them to form their own opinion and are not easily 'manageable'. As an experienced teacher, Jane offers an interesting perspective on how experience can be a significant factor in teacher hiring, not always in a positive manner:

I think to a certain point experience can start to work against you. There is a curve, I know people when they start approaching my age, they start to worry to even bother to apply for jobs. Because they have lots of experience and they feel like that works against them as opposed to help you because you are assumed to probably be settled in your ways, you are not malleable, you are not a young fresh teacher who has lots, lots of energy. You actually might have your own ideas about curriculum that you might push back on initiatives they are trying to impose on staff. You might have more influence over other staff members because of your experience, they might actually look up to you as a mentor, and that could be a threat. You are expensive, because [you are] at the top of the pay scale. You were educated in a different era and context. (extract from the focus group)

Anna adds that these experienced teachers might likely "have learned a healthy work-life balance" (extract from focus group). Jane closes by reflecting on how experience may affect teachers:

You survived that long, so you probably learned ways to dealt with that without absolutely pushing themselves to the extreme, right! Once that, you probably won't want a couch. (extract from the focus group)

The teachers' discussions further suggest that the hiring process takes place in an often outdated and bureaucratic hierarchy in most educational districts. Starting with the way administrators are hired, administration positions such as principals and vice-principals, are often open to career teachers, years of teaching alone does not necessarily mean professional merit, with a Master's of Education degree. In the past career teachers including, principals, just needed a Bachelor of Education. The participants suggest that, often, the criteria to become

administrators such as principals or vice-principals, is deficient. These teachers argue that the hiring of administrators, ideally, should be based on a combination of professionally recognized merit and required education.

The teachers in this study also criticized as ineffective, the common 'online teacher educational programs' such as the 'online leadership modules' a model which allows classroom teachers seeking to transition into administration, to take each module at their own pace. They suggest that these 'online modules', usually, do not offer a strong research component necessary to read and understand research. Research skills are important to administrators as, at some point, they will need to process theoretical information aligned with teaching expertise to base school initiatives. Maria suggests that administrators, generally, often do not have the skills to fully understand the theoretical papers that they use to base their decisions on as well as the necessary pedagogical connection to process what is going on in the classroom:

Too many people making decisions who haven't had a close touch with the classroom for a long time! In the end, they are also being asked to be accountable to the powers that are above them. And hierarchically of someone reading something without necessarily understanding it, and liking it, and bringing it, and saying 'oh, I can make a name for myself by implementing some new [initiative based on a research] regardless [pause] [of not fully understanding research]. (extract from the focus group)

In terms of internal hiring, generally, school districts "adhere to internal hiring policies in compliance with provincial and federal human rights and labor legislation" (Jack & Ryan, 2015, p. 67). It is important to mention that, for example, other administrative hiring positions such as specialists and learning leaders are offered to a career teacher not necessarily connected to their specific professional qualification for the positions. For example, if a school has an ELL

specialist position opened, only teachers who have been working for the district for a certain number of years can apply, regardless of whether they have the specific ELL expertise or ELL specialized education. Perhaps, the school might have a teacher on staff who has the ELL professional expertise allied to a Master's degree specialized on ELL, but regardless of qualifications that teachers will be subject to a certain number of years working as a teacher for that same district to be allowed to apply for the position she might be specialized in.

Pursuing a graduate degree has often become more a preparation for career advancement than trying to be a better teacher. This sets the context, in which the decisions to hire teachers are made. Depending on the administrator's education and experience the profile of the Canadian teacher is formed and hiring needs are determined. As Jane points to the fact that higher education has developed a strong commercialized approach to education over the years, especially with the advent of long-distance learning aided by advances in technologies, which has become quite popular among teachers seeking for ascending career opportunities:

We [teachers] are placed in the position of consumers. That has become such a prevalent mindset, that I think that most people [teachers] are not even self aware of it, and not questioning it. So, you know people that I work with [think] PD [professional development] is a module that you can buy 'combined' online. And paying for your combined mindful leadership modules [pauses], that you will be that much closer to having all the modules that you need in order to be considered for a leadership position [makes sense]. PD [professional development] is considered as a way to build bricks to get somewhere, and you buy your way there [reflective pause]! The question is, whether you want to pay 77,000 dollars for your PhD, if you can just get there by doing whatever you want to do? (extract from focus group)

Overall, effective hiring policies are vital to the success of education. The teachers in this study argue that, especially, for beginning teachers the hiring process can be quite challenging as there is a lot of pressure for these teachers to have a certain set of skills and, more importantly, the 'right' personal traits believed by hiring administrators as essential features found in good teachers. Such features can vary depending on the principal's perceptions of what makes a teacher, a good teacher. Teachers also argue that there is little incentive for practitioners to take time off work in order to pursue further education, and come back knowing that their teaching experience combined with the new acquired theoretical knowledge would be valued and properly recognized as opposed to teachers who opt to only take online leadership modules, which are often considered as building blocks for career advancement.

(2) Teachers' perceptions of the official educational responses to increased diversity

The second theme raised by the participants was that there appear to be official attempts of standardization through repackaging. This theme emerged out of conversations around how these four teachers perceive the new educational policies, which according to them, mainly focus on reinforcing assessment as a means to monitor and control what teachers do in the classroom. The topic is sub-divided into four parts as follows:

2.1 Perceptions of official standardization through repackaging

Repackaging refers to the return of past educational initiatives, such practices are often known and already being used by practitioners, in a more commercialized form as if it was the result of new research. According to the four high school teachers, these practices mainly take the form of strong emphases on assessment. As Anna explains that many of the 'new initiatives' imposed on teachers are already part of their practice:

I feel like a lot of the new initiatives are just repackaged ones. So, you [teachers] find that

they [administrators] are trying to push something, [and] a lot of [the] time you are already doing it in your classroom. So, in a sense, it is validated because you've been [pause] as a professional, you [teachers] are already making these judgments. People [teachers] are talking about those things and people [teachers] are doing them already. So, it's just adapting to the new terminology. (extract from the focus group)

2.2 Perceptions of the present emphasis on assessment and of the present mistrust of teachers

The teachers in this study indicated that there is a mistrust of teachers as education has turned to standardized modes, which prioritizes assessment through testing and data collection, disregarding teachers' knowledge of what is going on in the classrooms. The mistrust of teachers can be clearly illustrated in Jocelyn's remarks regarding the role of assessment in controlling what teachers do in the classroom:

I think the ones [initiatives], in the last couple of years, though, they [administration] have been asking us to do things that we've been already doing. But they [administration] have been asking us to quantify it; fill out forms about what we did; [And] crunch the data about it. And as things are going, it doesn't validate my experience or what I'm doing in the classroom and I feel like [frustrated] and I get resentful, sometimes with that stuff. And I said - 'look, I say to the person next to me, we do this all the time, but now I have to fill out some forms about it to prove it! I get a little resentful about that, but I mean, I know the meaning as well'. When they [administration] are forcing accountability, it is based on a mistrust of teachers and I don't think that's meaningful. (extract from the focus group)

Maria's following remarks further elaborate on how teachers see this distrust in teachers'

professional judgment which materializes in the educational initiatives. Maria illustrates that even when teachers have an opportunity to collaborate with other teachers, such collaboration process is somehow constricted:

The collaboration is a guided collaboration. I remember at the UBD [Understanding by Design], we have all teachers from different schools getting together and there is the script! And that's [short pause] there is the script, so when you go back to your school, we [you] will do what we just taught you! And if you get together with someone from another school and you are just talking about the kind of things you are doing, that's suspicious! (extract from the focus group)

Maria's remarks reiterate Jocelyn's views on how most of these 'new initiatives' being implemented in schools are repackaged practices known to teachers:

That's my impression too. All the initiatives you've seen now do not last 6, 7, or not even 10 years. There have been initiatives eroding the trust in teachers. And the teachers are kept under surveillance that is constantly, constantly pushing most kind of fears. If I make a professional judgment, would that be supported? Because, it is not what it is expected sometimes. Because there is a mandate, there is a particular way in which you are expected to report, you [teacher] are expected to mark, that you [teacher] are expected to provide information to parents and communicate. And even today, we had an email about the need to know news. It was about assessment and communication and, [administration] they're coming with a committee providing us with guidelines that have to be followed through the district. It's a painful article [to read], basically. (extract from focus group)

Anna also clearly agrees that there is a mistrust of teachers and argues that many in the

administrative body in education are disconnected from the classroom experience:

I think there are a lot of people [short pause] who are in administrative positions, who are separated from the experience of teaching. They have no idea how to get their hands on what is going on in the classroom. They don't trust [that] what [is] going on in the classroom as [is] positive. So, the only way to find out is to get quantitative measures. They [administration] think that to have you fill it[forms] out and then some how to get a grasp of what's going on, without realizing they [administration] will never have a grasp [on what's going on in the classrooms] that way! And if they'd [administration] just get in touch with what teaching really is, maybe doing some of it themselves. But they [administration] can't do that! They don't have enough time, and they do not want to. They know it in their hearts! That they [administration] are creating an untenable situation by simplifying facts, increasing classroom sizes and things like that. So that's the only way for them [administrators] to force teachers to do a good job, because they know they can, is to make you accountable. (extract from focus group)

Maria also points to a disconnection among different educational establishments in Canada:

So, I think there is no process that is significant in sorting out what is really working and what is not working [in the schools]! And there is, I personally think that there is not enough communication between the university in terms of doing research and school districts. And then even less connection to teachers. Because everything comes to us in a watered-down form through someone's perspectives, someone's interpretations. I

remember, for example, that thing about triangulation¹ out of context. (extract from the focus group)

Jocelyn adds that such disconnection is an obstacle to recognizing the local resources that could potentially be used to support effective educational initiatives in Canadian schools:

They (administration) spend millions of dollars by bringing in people from failing districts in the United States to tell us in one of the most successful districts in Canada how to do things differently. (extract from the focus group)

Anna's remarks give some possible reasons for the preference of administration to often bring in American experts to assist new educational initiatives, especially teacher professional development programs. She argues that these American experts are usually men, adding to a popular sexist belief in education that women teach, and men administer:

But I also think that there is something cultural. There is a Canadian inferiority complex that we simply have to look up to the Americans. Even though, it is this inverting, we have this superiority complex, we have always felt superior to the Americans and it comes to what I said a few minutes ago already! And we look at our system and we think it's better! And we have this flip side of it, too. Where we feel 'oh oh' if we are getting somebody really serious, if we're going to bring somebody really serious, we have to bring somebody from the States because 'why' somebody really local would be an expert on anything? They have to be from a big district, from a big place, and combined with it, we are mostly women and we've got to get a man! (extract from the focus group)

In this segment, the teachers' previous remarks on hiring practices are strongly supported

¹ Triangulation "is a process by which a teacher collects evidence about student learning; this evidence is collected from three different sources. These sources are conversations, observations, and products" (Bilash website, 2009).

and restated repeatedly. Our teachers point to some of the main challenges surrounding hiring practices such as 'the business model of education' suggesting, for example, that there is an influence of large corporations reflected in the publications we rely on in schools.

The participants also reiterate their theory that school principals in charge of teacher hiring are undertrained as often further education and professional merit are not key factors in the internal hiring processes. According to these four Canadian teachers, this criticism is also justified in the way the classroom teachers are being told to do things that they have already been doing for years but under a repackaged format. Such initiatives often come in the form of a book or websites or international speakers who are experts.

A trend I have also observed, working as K-12 teacher in recent years, is to have combined authored publications between a school administrator, who often provides the classroom teaching expertise and someone with a doctoral degree in education who adds some theoretical references to these teaching resources. These educators might have been at some point classroom teachers, but in a lot of cases have long been a professor, a commercial teaching coach or administrator. Regardless of some of the positive aspects to these kind of partnerships between theory and practice, the applicability of these decontextualized resources without the necessary pedagogical knowledge of the current challenges teachers face in the classrooms might not support teachers' efforts to improve teaching outcomes.

Teachers also seem to suggest that school mandatory professional development practices indicate that teachers are not always trusted to define their educational needs, but they also consider that in some cases this choice of 'One Size Fits All' model of professional development programs becomes necessary due to limited funding available.

Another important point in this segment is that most of the experts and publishers used to

base our school initiatives are Americans. The teachers in this study suggest that there is an underlined Canadian inferiority complex towards American made education, regardless of the fact that most educational ranking indicators show that the Alberta public educational system is characteristically more effective than any American jurisdiction. These assumptions, in addition to what may be inadequate research training of our administrators might strongly contribute to Canada being a consumer of American made educational resources at least in Alberta. This might also contribute to the underexploited educational research initiatives or the development of a strong research based educational system in Canada as Crocker and Dibbon (2008) suggest that, for example, most of literature on teacher education 'consumed' in Canada is not meant for a Canadian context, but rather produced and suitable to a distinctively different American educational context. For instance, Jocelyn talks about a documentary she watched on the expansion of large businesses, especially, into education:

The move [expansion] of big businesses, [and] big companies in the States into education, and the ones in education were the ones that they [the documentary] were interested in the most [pause] because they were by far the biggest. A very calculated corporate agenda in moving into the schools. And it's happening in the States, and then again, it kind of overflows into Canada. Because big companies like Pearson [Publishing Corporation] started to do things here as well, and so on. (extract from focus group)

Our teachers suggest that the largest publishing corporations in Canada are usually American, which cater for the Canadian educational market, mainly Alberta schools and districts, which seem to have a preference for American made products as if the fact that these educational resources are made in the US, gives them more credibility than Canadian made educational products such as books, academic articles and teaching resources. Jane explains why

she thinks that most of the academic work being published in Canada is disconnected from the classroom reality of Canadian teachers:

When I[*she*] came back to university [*she* was surprised to learn] that there are more researchers and theorists who think the same things that validated the way I [*she*] felt as a teacher, and [*their work*] did support my [*her*] ideas. But nobody is publicizing that, and that information is not getting out, and they [*academics*] are not speaking up when there is a public debate. The only people you hear, are the ones taking on their [*publicist*] positions. So, the academics are not really stepping up for the public debate or being smarter, then [*pause*] they are not being heard. (extract from the focus group)

Jocelyn adds that "education has become a consumers' market" (extract from the focus group). Therefore, if there is not much of a market to buy these educational resources, there is not much incentive for these corporations to lean towards supporting local researchers and education in the Canadian publishing context. In the following sub-theme, the four Alberta teachers talk about the misconception of diversity.

2.3 Perceptions of official multiculturalism as opposed to diversity

In this sub-theme, the participants speak about their overall understanding of diversity as multiculturalism. They suggest we have changed the use of the word 'multiculturalism' to address cultural and socioeconomic differences among students that amount to a continuation of the same ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic indicators to define who is diverse in schools.

Maria emphatically reminds us that there is a difference between the terms diversity and multiculturalism, but for many people in education this difference goes unnoticed. She seems to suggest that multiculturalism is associated to visible differences such as culture, race and language represented, for example, in celebrations of different cultural foods and ELL student

denominations in schools; while diversity is more likely associated to invisible, but not excluding visible, differences such lived experiences of students and teachers, regardless of cultural background, or even subtle things such as curriculum representation. Maria says that "there is a difference between multiculturalism and diversity. But I[*she*] think[s], they [multiculturalism and diversity] are blended in a lot of people's minds" (extract from the focus group). During her individual interview, Jane also shares her candid views on the role of religion in validating multicultural views of diversity in education.

This is a long but very insightful quote worth being shared here as Jane says:

You don't talk about cultural values and beliefs from a personal perspective because you have such an important influential role and you might be imposing on family values and so on. We have a very kind of [*stops and thinks*]; especially with the whole role of the "Bible belt" kind of influence in the province. You as a teacher don't have the right to be imposing your values, and there is a kind of settlers' suspicion of the values of people from other places, and so on and so forth. It wasn't until my inference into religion into diversity in religion, me being a practicing [*pause*], I don't even like the word, but Buddhist. Didn't feel like [*pause*] like coming out of the closet, when I went to Virgo school to teach, I could actually reveal what my personal believes were. In a way, that would feel that I somehow prophesying or having simply the wrong beliefs, basically! That would be fine because that would be diversity. We can all hold a different sense of values in the classroom, we share them and we can talk about them, and even the teacher can. Because usually there is a really strong appeal that you should encourage all your students to feel comfortable with each other and to be able to share their views and to be able to validate each others' view but you shouldn't really, as a teacher. (extract from

Jane's individual interview)

Overall, three of the teachers in the study, clearly suggest that the terms diversity and multiculturalism have two different meanings. According to these teachers, diversity does not exclude visible differences, but it is mostly characterized by invisible differences among students and teachers such as gender orientation, mental health, inclusion as opposed to multicultural views of difference based solely on visible features such as ethnicity, culture and socioeconomics. The teachers' remarks suggest that multiculturalism assumptions of difference are still predominant school culture. Perhaps, the term multiculturalism has been softened to diversity, but the implied multicultural practices based solely on visible differences are still prevalent in the way school administrators see teachers, and often teachers see students. Three out of the four participants also seem to suggest that perhaps at a superficial level, there is no differentiation among Canadian students. But if you take a closer look at schools, you can see how certain minority student groups are perceived to be diverse due to visible differences such as ethnicity, culture or socioeconomic status in relation to others who are simply seen as 'Canadians' or 'white' students.

In the following sub-section, the participants discuss the business model of education, which they think has strongly informed educational policies and administrative decisions.

2.4 Perceptions of the business model of education

All four teachers in this study commented on the 'business model of education', commonly implemented to an increasing degree in many schools. The teachers suggest that the 'business model of education' is a steady transformation and refocus of educational purposes and goal orientation towards capitalism. This 'business model' perceived by our teachers has added both educational and personal challenges for many teachers. Jane, for instance, suggests the

publishing industry has been influencing research practices by promoting 'fast research' trends, which often comes and goes quickly, leaving not much of a richness or substance to the field of education. Jane thinks that education needs consistency:

The business model that is in the research industry, all things change so fast and research becomes outdated in such a short turn around, that sometimes [it] is even pointless to follow the trends, right? (extract from the focus group)

Jane suggests that those involved in education have become 'consumers', and decisions are not always made taking into consideration pedagogical views of education but what is being promoted in the current market:

We [teachers/students] are placed in the position of consumers. That has become such a prevalent mindset that I think that most people are not even self aware of it, and not questioning it. (extract from the focus group)

Anna argues that the corporate approach does not promote equality in education.

Certain individuals benefit. There is a lot of lobby group kind of approach to one's own particular child who would benefit from it, regardless of how that affects or impairs the rest of the [student] group. (extract from the focus group)

During the focus group meeting, Maria and Jocelyn complement each other's comments on how such business model has also influenced professional development practices as they remark:

[The] prevalence of top to bottom approaches has increased. PD [professional development] is one of those things that administrations have to do and there is a committee, which is not representative of the teachers in the school. It's [made up of] selected people who that for whatever reason are interested in doing it. And they have to

follow, instruction given to them from the higher level of administration and that they have to be accountable for that. So, that's what the business model is doing. It is turning the system into a corporation potentially. (extract from the focus group)

Jocelyn also says that "[in administration] it's all integrated. The principal creates the budget for that year and the PD [professional development] has to be supportive of that budget. It's all very immersed" (extract from the focus group).

Anna talks about the increasing segmentation of individualism as opposed to collectivism in education, which might mean that some students will gain, and many will lose. Anna argues that schools are functioning like corporations seeking for profit and whoever is on the top of the chain gets most of the dividends:

Individualism versus collectivity. So, some individuals benefit, they get what they want. And they get what they think in the long run will turn them into a more wholesome citizen. But if you think, in the long run they will also be that lost alone individual too. But they get something they want, and I guess [they are] the people who are getting big salaries as administrators. They also get what they want because things are being controlled under them, and I guess they kind of know what is going on. I know the Fraser Institute gets what [it] wants. (extract from the focus group)

According to Jocelyn, teachers have been directly affected by the current changes in education. Jocelyn cites, for example, the excessive use of technology in educational initiatives, although, quite often such practices have proved to be ineffective:

The things they get into are technology, as a way to assess with technology to mark [with technology]. They are always trying to find ways to use a machine, they just can't quite make it happen, but then again, it's something that everybody knows it's not effective but

again, there is a push by companies that can make a lot of money from it. (extract from the focus group)

Maria remarks on professional development as a mean on controlling teachers as opposed to promote teachers' growth and its connection to the business model in education:

Going back to that whole idea that teachers are not trusted, there is a serious problem with the fact that teachers are not seen as experts. They [teachers] are seen as [pause] I don't know what they are seen as! But they [teachers] cannot make decisions and they will not [are not believed to] make the right decisions! Because we [teachers] want them to [administrators] make those kind of decisions, we [teachers] want them to make! I don't know! It's tough with PD [professional development] in particular because I think PD [professional development] is one of the ways of manipulating us and oppressing us [teachers]! (extract from the focus group)

Jocelyn also suggests that the business model is distorting the purpose of professional development as a tool for the professional growth of teachers.

Jocelyn suggests that administrators are often making uninformed decisions as they rely solely on research, which they do not always fully understand, and disregarding the perspectives and knowledge of those who are directly implementing school initiatives, the teachers:

Who has the energy to battle against it? How can you call up statistics? You can't fight that! Data at this moment, basically, an administrator doesn't have to understand what the study means, or how to interpret the data. All they have to say is 'data says', the 'research shows' [pause] and you can't possibly fight against that based on your own personal experience and knowledge from your own career. (extract from the focus group)

Anna explains that class size might not be an issue in more traditionally oriented

countries such as China, as she says that "Class size does not matter because in China they can do it [in China, an average class could have 60 students]" (extract from the focus group). In Canada, however, teaching approaches are more student-centered making it challenging to work with large class sizes.

Jocelyn also emphasizes that in Canada we do not screen students to write tests such as PISA, suggesting that in China such student screening performance is likely a common practice:

How representative is [the data from other countries such as China] it? Is [it] from the whole society, at all? Or is it a heavily streamed group of students to write the PISA?

While we have everybody writing the test. (extract from the focus group)

Thus, these teachers suggest that the prevalent business model is detrimental to many aspects of education such as the development of more effective professional relationships between administration and teachers. It may also affect the growth and development of school and university educational research, mutual interactions and partnerships. This model deeply compromises the reach and the quality of studies being made public, as teachers suggest that publication of research is controlled by a few large international companies, which focus on their own lucrative interests. This does not lend support to more effective research in less popular entrenched classroom problems such as the need for inclusive mental health initiatives, benefiting both students and the school community, including teachers. Teachers also suggest that the business model tends to support educational rankings such as PISA, which teachers say is biased and does not take into consideration different contexts, although the test is not the same for every country. These kinds of rankings are used to put pressure on educational systems and to highlight models argued on this basis as effective. It influences educational policies and administrative decisions towards sensitive issues such as classroom size, suggesting that

countries with large classroom sizes such as South Korea or China are on the top of the chart. This omits the reality that students taking the test might be handpicked, while in Alberta everybody takes the PISA test. This might lead to funding agencies which take educational rankings such as PISA to justify targeted studies which support policies that assure the business model of education.

2.5 Perceptions of the impact of mental health concerns of teachers and students

Anna's remarks suggest that mental health is mostly a neglected topic and quite often not addressed in school initiatives regarding teachers. Most of the initiatives addressing mental health focus on the students and how to incorporate mental health issues in teaching but not directly related to the care teachers might need in this regard. Anna argues that, quite often, when there is a PD initiative on mental health, it is usually run by external agencies and mainly focused on the students' mental health:

We had a good speaker talking about trauma in the pre-classrooms trauma response from the Zebra Center, anyway! And that was really great! It helped me to see my students in a new light, [and] that reflects in my own teaching and, how I respond to things in my classroom. That was much more valuable than a lot of stuff [PD] I've done, but again those are outside agencies that are working with us [teachers]. But I think the implications are that [pause], they [administrators] are taking care of those aspects of the students: The mental health and diversity, and we [the teachers] are taking care of curriculum and assessment. Who's taking care of our mental health, anyway? (extract from the focus-group)

Jocelyn takes the topic a step further as she mentions that education has become 'student-centered' as opposed to 'human centered'. Jocelyn's remarks suggest that administrators are

largely focusing on the needs of students, while not paying much attention to teachers' who need mental health support:

Again, there is a real move to view student centered education. Administration sees them [students][pause], as the only human being in the building as being students. And the teachers, there is a tremendous amount of concern you have to have for the way you treat students as people, treat them fairly and not make this as a punishment. None of it, it is applied to the teachers as they stop being human beings when they reach 18. (extract from the focus group)

Ultimately, Jocelyn suggests that a human-centered education would be more effectively inclusive as it would reflect the challenges and the needs of teachers and students as well as administrators.

In the following topic the participants share their views on their own professional growth: The teachers in this study argue that the increasing diversity in education has significantly challenged educators as well as administrators. They have struggled to find mechanisms to cope with these challenges. While administrators struggle to create educational policies to respond to such changes in the student population, teachers are the center of any policies as bearers of its implementations. The mental health of these professionals is of vital importance to the success of any educational effort to address the challenges of diversity in education. Despite this fact, mental health is not something being expressly addressed in schools, especially in regard to teachers and even administrators.

(3) Teacher's perceptions of the professional growth of teachers

The third important theme emerging out of the individual interviews and the focus group meeting was teachers' professional growth, which branched out into two large sub-themes:

formal teachers' education, in this case teacher preparation, and informal teachers' professional education such as taking part in professional development practices. The teachers also explored issues such as the relevance of their pre-service education to their teaching practices, assessment and professional development initiatives.

In this section, the teachers talk about their perspectives on their teacher education and how much applicability the things they learned as a student-teacher had in their practice.

3.1 Perceptions of pre-service teacher education as a preparation for diversity

When the teachers in this study were asked about the relevance of their pre-service education to their present teaching practice, they shared their experiences transitioning from student-teacher to practitioner. These teachers point to a disconnection between theory and practice. According to Jocelyn, her teacher preparation courses did not adequately address the classroom challenges she experienced as a practicing teacher:

They [courses] did [address my needs related to diversity] to a small extent. [But not really] enough. We had one course where we had a sessional, and I just don't remember which course it was. I think it was class management, which didn't seem to have anything to do with that! But every other week, we would have a special speaker, where every week or every other week we would have one [speaker]. It [topic] would be more about sexual orientation in the classroom. But it was one-hour lecture and then a couple of weeks later; there would be one hour on First Nations, Inuit, Métis perspectives and History. You know, it was very brief. So yeah, so at the university, I would say no.

(extract from Jocelyn's individual interview)

Jocelyn's remarks suggest that most of the courses offered at the university level have a more theoretical component approach, which often do not find applicability in the contemporary

classroom experience of teachers. Reflecting back on her teacher preparation over thirty years ago, Jane shares her perceived experiences:

Thinking back to when I was a student, it was a long time ago now; it was a lot harder for me. So I've been a teacher for so long, it's such a natural part of my life. That's how I operate. The mode I am in all the time. Everything I take in, I'm always thinking how I can use that or how that would be interesting [pause]. You know, I can teach that! For me being a teacher and being a student is so webbed together, everything I'm learning, I immediately think how fun it would be to teach that! (extract from Jane's individual interview)

Jane's remarks suggest that her teacher education did not prepare her for the classroom reality as she recalls that the beginning of her teaching career was difficult to transition from being a student-teacher into a practitioner. Jane also suggests that she continued to learn throughout her career, and every time she learns something new such knowledge influences her practice. Reflecting on her experience as a student-teacher and a full-time teacher, Anna says that they were different:

I would say that as a student-teacher, I felt more protected because I was not teaching a full load. I always felt there was someone I could talk to, to consult, to check, whether I was doing what I was supposed to do. (extract from Anna's individual interview)

Anna also candidly talked about the importance of having a mentor and time to reflect and prepare, prior to teaching a lesson:

As a student-teacher I felt there was one person, I could constantly go to, my mentor-teacher to talk things through before [pause] [teaching]. There was more reflection, I think because you would reflect on the assignment and the lesson before the lesson,

before it's executed, and then you talk about [it] afterwards. (extract from Anna's individual interview)

While as a full-time working teacher, Anna argues that the dynamics of developing and maintaining relationships with other teachers (which she seemed to have found helpful as a student-teacher) might get affected by the nature of teaching and how time consuming it was:

Sometimes when the job is really busy, I feel teaching can be quite isolating, when you have to meet deadlines. When you have to do prep or mark you own things and, just get the work done, sometimes, it gets in the way to[*pause*] communicating to other staff members. [*As a full-time teacher*], there are times that's there isn't enough time [*to reflect*] during the day with all the additional responsibilities. As a full-time teacher, [*there are lots of*] things to do and at the same time, you have these 30 kids asking you questions outside of class time, inside of class time, so I find it much busier! (extract from Anna's individual interview)

3.2 Perceptions of the disconnection between theory and practice in teacher education

The four teachers in this study argue that there is a certain degree of disconnection between theory and practice. Thus, they suggest they learned much more from practice than from the theory learned in their educational teacher preparation.

In addition to her teacher preparation, Anna for example, mentions how school support is important to bridge theory and practice, especially for new teachers; whether they want to collaborate with other teachers or simply to take the time to make their own professional judgment call on what is best for their class:

What's very nice at my school is that we encourage a lot of collaboration, but we are not constantly collaborating. There are times, when you just shut the door and do your own

thing and hope that's the best. I m trying my best to do more consulting with other people.
(extract from Anna's individual interview)

Maria speaks about her educational experience in Bulgaria compared to the one student-teachers receive in Canada. Maria remarks that as teaching was her second degree, in Bulgaria, she had to take additional courses which did not include a practicum component as opposed to Canadian student-teachers who mainly have an extended practicum experience.

I did my first teaching degree in Bulgaria. [With] teacher education in Bulgaria, we started as with a broad background. Essentially my designation in Bulgaria philologist. So, I am not a teacher, I did additional courses that allowed me also to be a teacher. But I have always been interested in culture, language, literature, particularly, language. So, I took philology and I also took the course to get a teaching degree attached to it. So, my experience as a student in Bulgaria were quite different from students here are. I only had to take three courses, one in technology and what not. So, I don't have experience on what it is to be a pre-service teacher educator, to become an educator. (extract from Maria's individual interview)

As for her experience in Canada, Maria suggests that as a graduate student, she finds what she has learned at the university level is mainly theoretical and disconnected from her classroom experience:

I would say that now going back to grad school, one of the biggest problems is the fact that as a practicing teacher, the things I've learned through experience just do not go with the theory. And theory sometimes creates this idealistic picture of what education could be, but I don't see it happening with what we have to work with in the classroom. Especially when one considers these three interconnected circles, the classroom which is

the center, the practice, and [the] academic, which is the research and the theory. (extract from Maria's individual interview)

Maria suggests that the disconnection between educational research and the classroom experience is due to what she describes as the business model of education:

And these are changes that have been happening in the corporate educational system.

And from both, from here [school administration] and from there [research and large corporations] we have pressure. But nobody is recognizing what's happening in the classroom. And starting from there to build theories or practices, starting from there to think about policies and things like that. (extract from Maria's individual interview)

Jocelyn argues that despite the fact that her experience at the university level was valuable, "mostly I [she] learned that I [she] will never know as much as I [she] need[s] to know! You know, the more that I teach, the more I realize that I know" (extract from Jocelyn's individual interview).

The following sub-theme grew out of the idea that teachers are continually learning and being trained throughout their teaching career, especially through professional development programs. Throughout the interviews the participants strongly suggest that, presently, the main focus of professional development is assessment.

The above remarks suggest that the experiences of teachers with teacher education were very diverse. Some argue that their teacher preparation had some impact in their practice, however, nothing significant. The teachers in this study suggest that the courses taken were, fundamentally, theoretical and disconnected from the classroom teaching experience. Their pedagogical knowledge came, mainly, from classroom practice. Basically, our teachers say that the courses and their experiences as student-teachers were not useful in comparison with their

classroom experience.

These teachers also point out that time to reflect is an important aspect of their experiences as student-teachers and that is something they do not experience as a classroom teacher. They suggest that the teaching profession is a fast-paced job, when the teachers are not teaching, they are attending professional development and listening to someone tell them what they expect you should be doing. That does not leave much time to reflect on their practice and how they could grow.

3.3 Perceptions of continuing teacher education

Assessment and professional development initiatives

Prior to the following remarks the participants were asked about their experiences with continuing teacher education, especially professional development practices. They shared their views on professional development by mainly saying that the most common professional development practices they attended, are school or district based professional development initiatives, which often are mandatory to teachers. This question led to some sub-topics, but the four high school teachers suggested, mainly, that these professional development practices carry an excessive focus on assessment. The four teachers agreed that the emphasis on assessment by constantly re-evaluating students is connected to the business model of education. As Anna and Jane suggest, for instance, that the student 'never failing' approach is mainly connected to the fact that administrators want to advance in their careers as Anna explains that by "pushing students through the system [short pause], and [that] does not do much good to education" (extract from the focus group). Anna argues that administrators encourage teachers to grant students ample opportunities to be reassessed:

Absolutely! Because they [administrators] get credits when they [do this]. [Teachers]

We're always encouraged to give students opportunities. If they [students] are not successful in something or what is handed in, we [teachers] should still accept it, even if [it's] four months late. (extract from the focus group)

Jane shares her views on the 'never failing' trend in education, meaning that students will never receive a failing grade even if they do not do the work or do it below expected standards, a practice she believes may have negative repercussions as she explains that more than assessing students, they need to have enough time to practice in order to learn. Jane states that having students to practice their skills without being tested is more effective than students not being required to develop their learning skills through practice prior to taking a test.

3.4 Perceptions of assessment and professional development initiatives

The participants further their remarks on continuing teacher education by focusing, specifically, on professional development practices and its strong connection to assessment. Maria shares her experience with assessment in Bulgaria, which were very different from her experience in Canada:

In Bulgaria, we were not allowed to do much [as a teacher]. I was shocked when I moved to Canada! What a lot of busy work is done [by teachers]. I taught language and literature. We had two major assessments for the whole year, two major assessments for the whole year, and the rest of it was conversations and observations. (extract from the focus group)

Jocelyn's remarks suggest that the system in place, which prioritizes assessment, is convenient, and there is no hurry to search for more effective ways of assessing students. She points to the fact that students need a lot more opportunities to practice and develop their skills, and constant testing may have a negative effect on students' learning:

There is not an urgency to improve [education]. And the more and the larger [the] number of assessments, the least validity each one has. If you have one big high stack assessment, it has to be really well designed. So then, it is worth putting all those eggs in that basket. But if you do have a couple of well-designed ones [assessments], you don't have to have all of these small ones [assessments]. We all know that they [students] can't really go on improving by doing something once or twice a semester. [Jocelyn expressing her thoughts about what Maria said about education in Bulgaria]. So, the difference is that in Bulgaria those were not the only times they wrote all year. They [students] got lots of practice because you have to have lots of practice. (extract from the focus group)

Jocelyn also suggested that this validation of learning through testing is not only coming from administration but also from a society that mainly validates learning through testing as opposed to practicing:

They [students] build a scenario of a societal expectation that would never write if [they] knew they weren't being assessed. [As a society] you would never do anything, unless it's being marked. That's the mentality! So, in order to get them [students] to actually practice as much as you [teachers] know they [students] need to in order to improve, [education and society] we've moved more and more into this having too much assessment. (extract from the focus group)

Building on Jocelyn's remarks, Anna adds that, often, neither parents nor students completely understand some assessment terms such as summative and formative, what each represents in the process of learning:

And it is also a misinterpretation of the terms formative versus summative [assessment] because they think that's not worth a percentage so why bother doing it! They [students]

don't realize it does count and it will help them to be more successful for something that is graded. (extract from the focus group)

The four teachers agreed that the excessive focus on assessment is not contributing to improving teaching or changing learning outcomes. It is the opposite because it takes time away from teaching and decreases the number of opportunities students would have to practice prior to taking a test. These teachers also argue that there is an underlying societal need to account for student learning through testing.

3.5 Perceptions of contemporary approaches to teacher professional development

The four high school teachers also commented on professional development practices and professional growth. Maria shared her experience in Bulgaria with mandated school professional development by describing them:

I'd go back to Bulgaria, we had [a] 5-day work week but we had one day of that work week that we could go and do our own sort of thing. So, I worked four days out of five and one day was my time for professional development. So, if I had to go back, I would definitely go back to that. Then, you have the time to talk to people that you want to talk to - collaborating, or just going to the library, and that's what I spent most of my time doing. I went to the library to do my thing, but I had that time designated as my time to develop professionally. (extract from the focus group)

Jocelyn also shares her views on what would be her ideal professional development and how such professional development opportunities might be a reality in some specific schools:

I hear stories of ideal places where other people teach like IB [International Baccalaureate] schools and international schools. They have very few students and a beautiful timetable, where they have a nice chunk of time everyday, which is set aside for

collaboration. They actually have time and luxury to actually have the energy to collaborate. Your PD [professional development] you can do all kinds of things, exactly what you are talking about, with the time created for it. So, they are not feeling like 'yeah, if we make time after school, when we are already exhausted. (extract from the focus group)

Anna suggests that her ideal professional development would be, simply, collaborating with other colleagues:

Working with teachers, collaborating with them and not forced collaboration. You have to meet this day and do these specific things. You do what you want, you do what you want to do. (extract from the focus group)

Most of the professional development, according to these teachers, is addressed on a small scale through schools and districts and the most popular PD model among administrators is the mandated 'One Size Fits All' professional development approach. These school/district professional development initiatives are often seen as just another responsibility teachers have to add to their daily teaching load, rather than a learning opportunity. The educators in this study would prefer to use this time allocated to professional development, to further their professional growth by being trusted to collaborate with other teachers in the same schools or in other schools with similar interests or a particular expertise without being directed or forced by administration.

3.6 Perceptions of professional development opportunities for teachers

In terms of professional development opportunities, the four Alberta teachers think that despite the fact that the student population has become increasingly diverse, diversity is not a popular topic addressed by professional development. Anna's remarks on her experience with professional development which addresses important aspects of diversity in the classrooms:

I've done different sessions at conferences and stuff on social justice and equity to teach to those in the classroom, but they are definitely sessions of choice for those of us [teachers] that are already interested in something else [that is not often offered at the school PD professional development] [level]. But I haven't been to a lot for all teachers or for the whole school. (extract from Anna's individual interview)

Jocelyn adds that the focus on diversity is for teachers who already have a particular interest in diversity. Jocelyn refers to these teachers by using a Freirian term 'conscientized', "yeah, it is more for teachers that have been conscientized or are being conscientized already, but I don't know too many of those [teachers]. There isn't much diversity on the radar" (extract from the focus group). Jocelyn indicates that the reason for diversity not being addressed could be due to the fact that most teachers and administrators are mostly of European origin or 'white', and they might not want to come across as speaking for other cultures or individuals who are visible minorities:

Yeah, maybe it is part of it. I mean, as you said teaching is again predominantly white.

Yeah, even those of us who [are] interested in issues of diversity are, speaking for myself anyway. I am always sensitive; I never want to speak for someone or for a group.

Inserting myself where I don't belong rather than listening to their voices. Yeah, I don't know if that's make sense. (extract from the focus group)

Anna suggests that professional development practices, especially mandated ones, are mostly about 'micro-managing' teachers:

That's when you get the worst push back and people hate PD [professional development] because of that very little thing! And the greatest, the most effective leadership is, in a PD [professional development] is when somebody [in administration] actually loosens the

ring and lets people[teachers] go because then, they[teachers] will get together and come up with ideas together and then it will be something we wouldn't have thought of otherwise! (extract from the focus group)

Jocelyn also weighs in on the best professional development approach:

And then you can say - today I went to J [pseudonym] place, it is PD for me, right! I've been wanting to do this for years, but you never get the time to go and watch people [teachers], how they [other teachers] are doing things in another setting. I always want to go, and sit in my friend's class, right! But you never have the time, and in other schools as well. When you get a chance like this for PD [professional development], just seeing like other teachers that are already successful at something doing something, is the easiest [professional development]. (extract from the focus group)

Maria builds on Jocelyn's remarks by saying that she would like to see professional development practices which trust teachers with their professional growth:

Going back to that [short pause] whole idea that teachers are not trusted. There is a serious problem with the fact that teachers are not seen as experts. They [teachers] are seen as [pause], I don't know what they are seen as! But they [teachers] cannot make decisions and they will not make the right decisions! Because we [administration] want them make those kind of decisions we want them to make! I don't know! It's tough with PD [professional development] in particular because I think PD [professional development] is one of the ways of manipulating us and oppressing us! (extract from the focus group)

Jane argues that the most useful professional development relates to one's own special interests:

Mainly the one in literature I have been doing has to do with professional development within the particular area of interest that I've got [pause], because it has to do with mindfulness training and so on. A lot of that is about how stressed teachers are and whether or not they value professional development in this [mindfulness] area. (extract from the focus group)

Interestingly, Jane makes a connection between the school mandated professional development focuses and the experiences of principals, as she says these topics are often linked to the principals' professional preference and closeness to the topic:

And yet, on the other hand, don't you want to get PD [professional development] from someone who validate your own experience? And try things in the classroom and say that instead of a lot of PD [professional development], and then say I tried that one in a classroom, and then I got my job then now I can move up. And I don't know if it will work again but compared to people that I've tried these for the last 10 years in the classroom, this is what works and that's what didn't work. So then, more experience you have, more balanced you are, not so enthusiastic. That's how a lot of these initiatives come because somebody is really eager, enthusiastic, because they [administrators] have done their Master's on it. So, they [administrators] have done more reading [on the subject]. (extract from the focus group)

Jane concludes her thoughts by saying that, in her experience, professional development initiatives are not based on teachers' views of what they think their needs are for professional growth:

I think, it's true that none of the PD and not enough of the literature is about the actual lived experiences of teachers... And I don't think enough PD is about the lived

experiences of teachers and I don't think that enough that honors the experiences of teachers enough. (extract from the focus group)

Summary of Results:

Diversity is a topic rarely addressed by school or district professional development initiatives, which our teachers reiterated is mostly, focused on assessment and administrative interest matters (Alberta Education, 2006; Alberta Education, 2010a). The teachers in this study argue that educators interested in diversity or any other topic relevant to their real professional growth need to struggle to find the time and the resources, which usually involves the cooperation of the administrators, to attend other professional development initiatives focused on teachers' subject of interest rather than the usual professional development normally offered by schools and districts that are narrowed down or restricted to very few topics (Harwell, 2003). Our teachers also suggest that there is not much of an incentive to professional growth as professional development opportunities tend to be the ones overseen by the administration due to the lack of trust of teachers. The teachers point to the importance of offering professional development opportunities which include and validate teachers' experiences, such as professional development initiatives which include the teachers' input in the decision-making process around important topics (Bautista & Ortega-Ruiz, 2015; Broad & Evans, 2006; Opfer & Petter, 2011).

The participants also point to the misunderstanding of diversity as multiculturalism, as one of the teachers explains that the lack of diversity as a central topic in professional development could be because the majority of teachers and administrators who are visibly 'white', feel uncomfortable talking about diversity as they might perceive diversity as exclusively related to different cultures and races, aside from the mainstream Anglo-Canadian culture (Harper, 1997; Palmer, 1982). This speaks to the notion of perceiving diversity as an array of

different cultures, languages and races, while referring to ethnically European descent individuals as homogeneously one (Guess, 2006). This perception is aligned with the complexity of conceptualization of multiculturalism and diversity in a Canadian context (Silverman, 2010).

Our teachers share their perceptions and understandings of a wide range of complex issues in the current context of diverse classrooms. These include the disconnection between formal teacher education applied by universities and often school based professional development practices and career long continuing 'informal' education of teachers through experiences and self-growth initiatives such as alternative professional development practices in the form of peer collaboration and other unconventional ways in which teachers seem to learn, particularly in the context of diversity. As well, they commented on other additional issues that impact teachers' effectiveness and growth, such as hiring practices and educational policies responding to the challenges of the increasing student diversity.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Results and Recommendations

This study explores the perceptions of the experiences of four high school educators teaching in the context of diversity in Alberta classrooms. The teachers in this study addressed the need for further understanding of the meaning of diversity in a Canadian context. This is an important issue in education, as the conceptualization of what diversity is, most likely influences the way teachers are perceived by most narratives in educational policies, professional development initiatives and research (Guess 2006; Hamm, 2015; McLeod, 1975; Palmer, 1982; Silverman, 2011). Such narratives often indicate that Canadian teachers, including Alberta teachers, are simply 'white'; this perception of diversity based on ethnicity, culture and socioeconomics, is often described in research focused on an American context (Banks & Banks, 2004; Milner, 2010).

Discussion of Results

The findings in this study indicate that this American oriented perception of diversity might spill into Canada, influencing attempts to promote teachers' professional growth, and subsequently impacting teacher effectiveness in a Canadian context. Canadian literature on diversity such as Gérin-Lajoie (2012; 2008) as well as Ryan, Pollock, and Antonelli (2009) are examples of how American contextualized ideas influence our understanding of diversity in Canada. The authors mentioned suggest a categorization of diversity based on race, implying that Canadian teachers are mainly 'white', while characterizing diversity among students through the lens of race suggest that destitute students of color are the diverse ones in Canadian schools.

This study also pointed to the attempts of provincial education to address the challenges imposed by the increasing student diversity through standardized oriented approaches to

educational policies by, mainly, enforcing accountability through assessment and favoring the implementation of 'traditional' views of school based professional development initiatives, that instead of empowering teachers to become active agents in their own professional growth, tend to position teachers as passive depositories of knowledge (Alberta Education, 2006; Freire, 1970; Kohli et al., 2015; Rodrigues, 2005).

In terms of the general understanding of the context of the study, this research assumed first, that teachers in different parts of Alberta would experience the increasing student diversity and increasing standardization requirements in much the same way. The researcher's second assumption was that a discussion from a limited number of teachers in any jurisdiction, would provide insight into the perceptions or the experiences of teachers that are likely to be the same anywhere in the province, especially, in major urban cities in Alberta. These two assumptions are based on the fact that Alberta educational teaching guidelines on diversity such as Alberta Education (2006), Alberta Education (2010a), Alberta Education (2010b) and Alberta Teachers Association (2009), for example, do not seem to differentiate teachers' diverse challenges across the province.

The data collected in this study provided not a statistical reference but a significant zoomed in qualitative overview on a number of important issues related to the increasing diversity in Alberta classrooms, namely, teacher preparation, professional development, hiring practices and standardization of education. The study also strongly points to the possibility of rethinking the way Alberta teachers are mainly perceived as simply 'white'; such a view neglects the individuality, rich experiences and sense of identity of teachers across the province.

The findings are surprisingly different from popular American studies addressing diversity. For example, Banks and Banks' (2004) and Oakes' (2005) studies look at diversity in

education focusing, mainly, on the problematic interactions between 'white' teachers and 'racialized' students, perpetuating the problematic construct of race (Guess, 2006). This study also points to the need for a human-centered understanding of diversity, which seek to understand diversity beyond the assumptions of race, culture and socioeconomic factors but rather acknowledges the differences and the needs of teachers, students and the whole school community as part of the large spectrum of diversity in Canadian society.

This study also highlights some important issues in Canadian education such as the definition of what diversity is as opposed to what multiculturalism means in our society. As the term multiculturalism has been replaced by diversity, especially in educational contexts. However, when we look at more recent literature as to why this change happened, we might ask ourselves if the meaning has also been replaced, as diversity has often been perceived in Canadian schools as a continuing of multiculturalism, in which people are confined to their cultural, ethnic groups and socioeconomic locations (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008; Gérin-Lajoie, 2012; Syed, 2010). As one American author puts it "tension can emerge when students of color are expected to learn and to adapt their behaviors and the ways in which they operate in their homes to the expectations of their mostly white teachers" (Milner, 2010, pp. 122-123). But diversity in education is much too complex to be simply referred to as 'white teachers teaching destitute students of color' as American research tends to do (Guess, 2006; Silverman, 2010; Wiltse, 2005).

These four Alberta teachers insistently indicate that they are very diverse in a variety of ways, such as their experience, formal and informal education, and their approach to teaching in diverse classrooms. However, the recognition of teacher diversity may add to the many challenges administrators already have to cope in the current context of diversity (Alberta

Teachers Association, 2014b; Mason & Schroeder, 2010; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2008).

As administrators are expected, at the school level, to provide teachers with professional development opportunities, the conceptualization that teachers are simply 'white', supports the 'One Size Fits All' professional development model, which is very popular and easy to implement in schools. By putting the pressure on teachers to be a certain kind of expected teacher following 'the good teacher' paradigm, administrators avoid the critical questioning of school initiatives, which often are informed by decontextualized educational scenarios (Connell, 2009).

Hiring practices were also a recurring topic unexpectedly relating to diversity among the participants. These four teachers' remarks suggest that hiring practices are of key importance to education, especially in the context of diversity as it has a direct impact on teachers in terms of which teachers get hired and how that might relate to the diversity of both student and teachers in the classrooms (Cranston, 2015). The teachers commented on a number of important aspects of hiring practices such as who does the hiring, how this process is informed, and who gets hired and how that might relate to teaching and the school culture (Cranston, 2015; Mason & Schroeder, 2010). These reflections are necessary in this society because the understanding of what makes a teacher, a good enough teacher to be hired, can have a huge impact on how we portray teachers in the context of diversity and its impact on learning outcomes and educational policies.

The principal, who generally is in charge of hiring in most schools, is a former teacher who has been promoted into principalship (Rose, 2013). The participants suggest that every principal has his/her own understanding of what a good teacher is, and their hiring decisions are often a result of what the principals' beliefs are. As the person officially doing the hiring, the principal has his/her own expectations related to what kind of teacher he/she will be hiring, not

necessarily based on professional abilities, but on other personal traits such as a malleable personality or someone that will not challenge authority (Jack & Ryan, 2015). Our teachers also mention how other things such as teaching experience can be an asset or liability, depending on who is hiring. Our teachers say that hiring is often based on 'who you know'. That is to say, knowing somebody in the school or district can be quite helpful as some principals might have a preference for teachers who are referred by someone they already know professionally. However, teachers agree that teachers are also hired based on professional merit.

It is also important to note that the process of teacher hiring is quite complex and bureaucratic. This process focuses mainly on two aspects: Teachers' professional traits as well as personal traits. In terms of hiring practices, administrators are quite independent, and each administrator has his/her perception of the ideal teacher candidate (Jack & Ryan, 2015). This does not always involve the teacher's teaching skills or pedagogical qualities but is more of a combination of personal and professional preferences on the part of the administrator.² The actual hiring often depends on what the principal perceives as being important to the success of the specific teacher position. For example, all four Alberta teachers suggest that most of the teacher hiring is done through networking. Otherwise stated, knowing someone who knows someone in the school.

The participants also reflect on the different kinds of teacher hiring processes and what

² I would add that in terms of administrative or internal hiring, in my own experience as a teacher in Alberta, I observed that school districts seem to be run like an old ineffective family business. Very often one is not ascending to an administrative or expert position that requires certain skills because one necessarily has those skills. All you need to know is that, for example, in a pool of five people, independently of having or not of their range of the specific skills or education needed, only the ones with a certain experience working in the district are eligible to apply for the position, even if that means the lack of skills could lead to low work performance. Newly hired teaching staff, even if they have the work experience and education, they are still not allowed to apply for this kind of positions.

they mean to education. The most common hiring processes are: The first one is when teachers are first hired by a school and the other one, may take place after a specific number of years working for the same school board, teachers are apt to apply for ascending internal leadership positions. In terms of internal hiring, that is the hiring of teachers who are already employed by the district; the participants say that many teachers pursue further education, mainly in order to be considered for administrative school positions such as principals, vice-principals and learning leaders (Rose, 2013). The career ascending hiring process of these teachers is controversial, as the participants suggest that the education required in order to apply for such leadership positions is inefficient and professional merit is not always part of the hiring criteria.

In conclusion, my findings suggest that the work of principals has become increasingly complex and fundamental to the success of education as one of the main roles of principals is to choose 'the right' teachers to fill up teaching positions in schools (Alberta Teachers Association, 2014b; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). Some studies, however, suggest that there is not a consensus of what makes a teacher a 'good teacher', as the matter is subject to various interpretations and often depends on individual understanding or judgment of principals on what constitutes the 'right' pedagogical competences and training, and sometimes even personal traits teachers need to possess to be considered an ideal teacher to be hired (Calderhead & Shorrock, 1997; Cornell, 2009; Fredua-Kwarteng, 2013; Jack & Ryan, 2015; Moore, 2004).

Another issue raised in this study was how prepared these principals are to perform such a complex role, in addition to all other responsibilities bestowed upon their professional realm, in a time where accountability is a central part of a principal's career portfolio (Coladarci, 2010; Harris et al., 2011). The findings in this study suggest that these administrators are often undertrained and might be related to their hiring process, as they are not always hired for

outstanding professional teaching or administrative performance merit, but rather under internal hiring policies, which often consider teachers pursuit of further education in any subject area, usually, through a master's degree to be apt to perform administrative and pedagogical roles as principals (Rose, 2013). The findings also indicate that principals, who are usually the ones responsible for hiring teachers, often overlook research-based hiring practices focusing on professional teacher portfolios. These principals, mainly, rely on unconventional hiring methods, generally, based on their experiences and beliefs acquired over time such as personal preferences for certain teachers' personal traits that they might think are a good match for the school culture (Fredua-Kwarteng, 2013; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015).

In addition, the study also suggests that some unorthodox hiring practices may be also a factor on the belief of what is a 'good teacher' during the hiring process, for instance, principals might rely on 'who they know' when making hiring decisions, that is to say, they might trust a good word of a colleague's reference to judge the teachers' professional competencies. Such unconventional hiring practices maybe explained as accountability for school success is an essential part of the principals' professional portfolio. In the context of this increasing student diversity, the stakes might be even higher for hiring a suitable teacher, principals may feel the pressure and lack appropriate training and confidence in their own judgment alone as for hiring the 'right' practitioner (Fredua-Kwarteng, 2013; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015).

Furthermore, the current study provided some very interesting insights in the experiences and perceptions of teachers' views on a variety of issues facing diversity in education and how schools have responded to its challenges. The discussions among these four Alberta teachers have led to themes and subthemes that created and enhanced questions and responses to issues of diversity as follows:

In response to the first question being asked: **What are the perceptions of the experiences of high school teachers with respect to the increasing diversity in their classrooms and schools in Alberta?**

Especially during the focus group meeting, our four teachers wove their experiences, adding to each other's comments and often generating additional topics connected to their experiences in the diverse classrooms and schools in Alberta. Such experiences are rich and complex as they include the teachers' reflections on their formal and informal education, classroom experiences, interactions with students and other teachers, and other external factors such as how their lived experiences are connected to their practice and may have contributed to form their professional identity.

The individual interviews as well as the focus group meeting provided teachers with the opportunity to reflect on what matters in education on an individual basis and as a member of the educational community. This process of reflection among these four high school teachers shows how diverse they are in terms of how they perceive themselves in the world and their career journey in education and, most likely reflect on how it all connects to their perceptions and understandings of the diversity present in the schools, and especially in their students.

Many topics emerged as our teachers shared their experiences and what they learned over the years about diversity in the classrooms and in schools. The following are the topics which emerged from the individual teachers' interview and the focus group meeting:

Diversity in the classrooms

The findings in this study strongly suggest that the recognition of diversity in education is more evident among the student population (Gérin-Lajoie, 2012; Harper, 1997). Our four Alberta high school teachers point to how schools acknowledge student diversity through cultural

celebrations, school initiatives such as ELL school programs to help language diverse students, and by recognizing those commonly seen as socioeconomically diverse students like aboriginal students (Alberta Education, 2010b; Alberta Teachers Association, 2009; Calgary Board of Education, 2018; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012; Syed, 2010). The teachers in this study also comment on the fact that there is nothing similar to what is offered to students regarding the recognition of teacher diversity in schools (Alberta Education, 2010b; Alberta Teachers Association, 2009). Teaching accommodations and considerations towards the experiences of diverse students are strongly encouraged in teachers' practices (Alberta Education, 2010b). However, such views of inclusion of diverse perspectives in education are only extended towards students' needs, while teachers are mostly seen just as 'white', that might imply that there is no diversity among teachers. These 'white' teachers are assumed to be former Canadian students who grew up in a diverse society; therefore, they are familiar with diversity implying there is no need to further understand or reflect on what diversity is (Gérin-Lajoie, 2012; Guess, 2006; Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009; Silverman, 2010).

The findings in this study also suggest that if our four teachers perceptions' are typical that in terms of diversity in the classrooms, while there is some recognition for students diversity beyond the idea of race and socioeconomic status among students through educational initiatives targeting other aspects of student diversity such as mental health needs; The same do not include teachers needs to address the challenges teachers face in relation to the increasing student population and their own diversity (Alberta Education 2010b; Alberta Teachers Association, 2009; Calgary Board of Education, 2018).

Another finding is the insightful suggestion of our four teachers that students may not always aware of their own diversity. This might be due to the belief that minority students tend to

integrate into mainstream Canadian culture and assimilate (Kumar & Hamer, 2013). As Aoki (2005) suggests, the lived experiences of teachers are key to education, I would include my own experiences teaching in a racially diverse school in a major urban city in Alberta, which offers a different perspective to the assumption that students do not see difference among themselves. As I also observed in one of the large middle schools I worked, located in a newer suburban area where most of the students were either Canadian-born from immigrant parents or born abroad. Despite the fact that the majority of students were ELLs, the school was comprised of only a few culturally dominant student groups, I noticed that the students had a tendency to associate themselves with their cultural group and, be more critical of each other's cultural differences, not in terms of race but things such as language, often singling out newer immigrant students, for example, poking fun at the students' accents. This fact could be related to the culture of Anglo-Canadian assimilation which still to a certain extent is relevant today through the curriculum and mainstream Canadian culture (McLeod, 1975; Palmer, 1982).

An equally important insight offered by our four teachers is that teachers are themselves diverse in terms of backgrounds and experiences, and even a sense of identity. However, such diversity is not always recognized or naturally acknowledged by the teachers themselves. It begs the question that if these teachers have not had the opportunity to reflect on their own diversity, how can they be expected to meaningfully understand the diversity among a highly diverse student population?

The perceptions of our four teachers also suggest the insight that it is fundamentally important for teachers to explore their own intrinsic sense of identity within the context of diversity, in order to better understand their students' diversity (Courtland & Gonzalez, 2013). This study suggests the interactions between teachers and students in the context of diversity in

schools can be complex and divisive as [mis]understandings of 'who' is diverse, especially seen through the lens of cultural stereotyping through heritage assimilation, might lead to divisive narrative interactions of 'us' the Canadian teachers, and 'them' meaning the 'diverse' students (Kumar & Hamer, 2013; Towers, 2013). This subtle interaction might influence how these teachers make curriculum choices and compromise their ability to adequately provide students with the necessary support they might need. For example, if a teacher sees diversity through the lens of race and culture, they might associate the needs of ELL students to 'language' only, aboriginal students to 'learning disabilities' and destitute students to poor parenting and lack of support at home as opposed to scrutinizing these students' academic abilities to try and further understand their challenges.

Another strong suggestion in this study is the relationship between Canadian and American culture on how these two countries are historically different in the ways they perceive and approach diversity (Palmer, 1982). This study suggests that Americans are more likely to see diversity through the lens of race, having dichotomy narratives that often perceive teachers as 'white' practitioners teaching 'racialized' students (Bank & Banks, 2004; Milner, 2010). While the American multicultural narrative might spill into Canada in the form of diversity it is not as significantly perceived in the school culture in Canada, as the overall issues with diversity are mostly addressed through the curriculum that suggests a continuity of cultural Anglo-Saxon values and beliefs assimilation through education (Gérin-Lajoie, 2012; Guess, 2006; McLeod, 1975; Palmer, 1982; Silverman, 2010).

The educational system in Canada was initially established by the British and French Canadians (McLeod, 1975). For many years, education in Alberta like in other parts of Canada, for example, were mainly based on assimilation of British culture values, ignoring specific

values of minority student populations (Palmer, 1982). Some relatively recent studies such as Watt and Roessingh (1994) suggest that the Alberta curriculum did not promote educational equity among students, and English language learners were not given the English language support they needed in order to succeed academically, and even though some ELL students finished high school, many of these minority ELL students dropped out of school and never finished. In another study, Roessingh and Douglas (2012) also suggest that ELL students continue to underperform compared to their native English-speaking peers as they entered the university. Although, Cummins (1981) seems to suggest that one of the reasons that could influence non-native English-speaking students' testing performance is the fact that they could have been tested before developing the expected English academic language level to take such tests. Some studies also point to an apparent disparity between the low academic achievement among aboriginal students compared to mainstream Canadian students (Hardes, 2006; Hinks, 2011; Howe, 2014).

In more recent years, the Canadian student demographic has dramatically changed due to a substantial rise in diversity through immigration and "Canadian birth patterns" (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009, p. 552). These facts contributed to a significant increase in the diverse student population. On the other hand, the teacher demographic has not changed much as most of the practicing Canadian teachers are still of European origin, and it is implied that these teachers are not diverse but simply 'white' (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009). The findings in this study suggest that the assumption that Canadian teacher practitioners are simply 'white' can be problematic as it disregards other factors of diversity such as the teachers' background and lived experiences. Also, how these teachers see themselves, namely, their identity. Perhaps, these teachers might be of mostly European descent but even this fact is complex, as Europe is a

continent with some cultural similarities but also quite diverse and that could influence teachers' experiences and interactions, and even their sense of identity.

Another important issue addressed in this study was 'selected diversity', which suggests that education is focusing, exclusively, on student diversity as the increasing number of immigrants from Asia, Africa and the Middle East as well as Eastern Europe, South and Central America and other parts of world transition into Alberta school districts in Alberta. The recent changes in the student demographic have created significant challenges to education. Many new educational initiatives have been created, and implemented by school boards, which combines a variety of different attempts to attend to the diverse learning needs of these students; as international educational rankings such as PISA suggests the Alberta students' academic achievement in mathematics, science and reading, at which Canadian students, especially those in Alberta, have been successful at for many years, have slightly declined in recent years (Alberta Education, 2006; Alberta Teachers Association, 2010; Chu, 2017; PISA, 2012; PISA 2015; Richards, 2014).

Additionally, this rapid increase in student numbers in Alberta (Calgary Board of Education, 2008; Edmonton Public School report, 2014), is especially affecting English language literacy, placing ELL students' English language achievements at the center of concern. These students have become the focus of many educational initiatives as language learning among ELL students and language literacy deficiencies among minority groups are seen as urgent issues to be addressed. The learning needs of aboriginal students, for example, who are mostly categorized in provincial terms as part of the visible socio-economic diverse minority groups, have also been a focus of these initiatives (Calgary Board of Education, 2018). Despite all the efforts and resources spent on implementing these initiatives with the hope of improving diverse student

learning outcomes, recent studies suggest that, for example, ELL students are still academically performing below their native English-speaking peers at university level (Crossman & Pinchbeck, 2012; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012).

Overall, the perceptions of the four teachers in this study suggests the further insight that in terms of diversity in the classroom, the focus is solely on students' diverse needs. As the perception of students' performance might be influenced by educational performance indicators based on rankings in tests such as PISA and ranking in the Fraser Institute, despite of criticism suggesting that such results cannot be a solo indicator of either success or failure of and educational system (Cowley & Easton, 2016; Dunsmuir & Krider, 2010; Fernandez-Cano, 2016).

In terms of responding to the needs of this increasingly diverse student population, my findings suggest that the ways in which we understand and prioritize student education relative to diversity, might need to be reviewed. The teachers' arguments in this study indicate that the student-centered diversity focus is not addressing the overall complexity of diversity in schools. Selective diversity, which prioritizes visible students' needs are based on multicultural biases of diversity, and not taking into consideration that everyone, including teachers, are affected by the challenges of diversity.

Diversity in schools

In terms of diversity in schools, according to the insight of our four teacher informants, our attention turns mainly to teachers and administrators, especially principals who are former teachers, in addition to student diversity. The understanding of diversity in schools ought to highlight the often neglected or misunderstood topic namely, diversity among teachers.

Our teachers strongly suggest that education prioritizes a student-centered diversity, while teachers are not seen as diverse and often referred to entirely as simply 'white teachers',

which suggest a black/white binary understanding of the term diversity (Gérin-Lajoie, 2012; Guess, 2006; Milner, 2010). Referring to teachers as simply 'white' can have a divisive and racist connotation (Guess, 2006). However, this term is frequently used in the literature such as the American ones reviewed in this study that tend to classify European people as ethnically white people and as a socially privileged group, while contrasting it with other assumed marginalized non-white groups (Bank & Banks, 2004; Milner, 2010; Oakes, 2005).

The teachers in this study speak to a general view that there is hardly any recognition of diversity among teachers by administrators, educational policies and further teacher education practices such as professional development initiatives. Teachers suggest that this understanding of teacher diversity is often inaccurate and simplified due to the fact that most Canadian teachers in Alberta are seen as visibly 'white', while currently most students are defined as socioeconomically, culturally and ethnically diverse. Our teachers' remarks point to the fact that diversity among teachers is a complex issue and needs to be understood beyond superficial characteristics such as ethnic origin, that is to say skin color as 'whiteness' is a social construct (Guess, 2006).

Such diversity among Alberta educators can be perceived in their diverse backgrounds, lived experiences, as well as teaching experience which might also influence their sense of identity, challenging the assumption that these teachers all share the same values as they are all light skinned or of European origin. The four Alberta teachers in this study make a statement on how diverse teachers can be: For instance, one of our teachers in this study who is visibly 'white', Jane, grew up in a farm in Alberta but had the opportunity to travel and experience diversity both locally and internationally. The fact that she is visibly of European origin might have influenced the way others perceived her abroad. Her diverse teaching experiences abroad, as well as locally,

have shaped who she has become as a teacher. In Jane's over 30 years of teaching, she has diversified her practice by teaching diverse minority groups such as aboriginal and ELL students. She has also taught student-teachers and worked with professional development as a consultant. This rich variety of experiences made her much more aware of different educational perspectives and cultural sensibilities. Another example of an Alberta teacher is Anna. She embodies the diversity that goes beyond the common American assumption seen in the literature, portrays the race of teachers as being simply 'white' (Milner, 2010). Anna, a first generation Canadian born of Chinese descent, tells us about her experience growing up in a diverse urban center and later on experiencing diversity as a teacher. She says that growing up she attended a socioeconomic and culturally diverse school. As a teacher, she was very familiar with the cultural sensibilities and different educational perspectives she found in the schools she taught.

Jocelyn, another Alberta teacher, give us a clear picture of the common perceptions of an Alberta teacher. She is a 'white', middle class woman of European origin who grew up in a small town outside of Edmonton and, whose parents were both teachers. However, she thinks of diversity as something that is part of her life as a teacher. During her decade of teaching experience, she has taught in schools where the student population was comprised of a wide range of different cultures, languages and family diverse socioeconomic standing, plus all the other aspects of what makes up diversity. Jocelyn thinks of herself as one of the few concientatized teachers in the schools she has worked, where most of the teaching staff were seen, and saw themselves simply as 'white', and who had very little regard for or understanding of the diverse student population they were teaching. Courtland and Gonzalez (2013) suggest that teachers should explore their own identity, in order to better understand their diverse students.

Maria, who is originally an immigrant from Eastern Europe, mentions that in Bulgaria her students mostly shared a similar ethnic and cultural background. She seems to look at diversity mostly as contrasting different cultures and through educational approaches. She noticed that when she was first employed in Alberta, the school administration valued a more traditional approach to teaching, similar to what she was used to in Bulgaria, but these approaches have changed in recent years. The fact that Maria did not have much experience with student diversity while teaching in Bulgaria, might indicate that the common belief that an 'immigrant' teacher would have a better understanding of diversity than a local average Alberta teacher, can be controversial as some of these 'immigrant' teachers come from more culturally and ethnically homogeneous societies compared to Canada (Janusch, 2015; Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009). Interestingly, the researcher does not find Maria referring to students' diversity as it relates it to culture or race. Maria's remarks suggest that she saw diversity embodied in different learning needs, teaching approaches, and administrative policies which very often may suppress and do not validate teachers' perspectives on education.

Closely associated to the teachers' remarks emphasizing how diverse Canadian teachers are, hiring practices relative to the needs of student diversity emerge as an equally important theme. The study also suggests that hiring practices are critically vital to diversity in teaching. Though, the study finds that hiring practices rely mainly on unconventional hiring methods such as teacher networking or simply 'who you know' and principals' preferred personal traits over professional qualifications (Jack & Ryan, 2015). The teachers in this study suggest that there is an expectation that in order to become a certain kind of teacher that suits the perceptions of what a good teacher should be, is often noticed especially through hiring practices (Mason & Schroeder, 2010). For teachers trained abroad, as in Maria's experience, her educational training

and teaching experience in Bulgaria were disregarded in the Alberta context and as for her principal, such experiences were considered unimportant. He thought her professional qualities were merely defined by her having certain personal traits such as a sense of humor (Jack & Ryan, 2015; Mason & Schroeder, 2010).

In another instance, the study also suggests that the overall assumption that generally having teaching experience is an asset that would certainly be crucial to being hired is more of a myth as having teaching 'experience' can be an asset, but it can also be a liability in the hiring process. Having teaching experience may affect the hiring process in different ways: As experience suggests that you are likely to know how to teach as you have taught before and have had your teaching abilities evaluated and might be able to provide supporting documents such as reference letters. However, experience can also have some negative connotations as many years of teaching might be viewed negatively by some administrators, as very experienced teachers could be seen as unmanageable or capable of influencing staff, perhaps in opposition to the administrators' views.

These examples suggest that Jane, Anna, Jocelyn and Maria illustrate how diverse these Alberta teachers can be in their professional experiences, pedagogical practices and worldviews. Therefore, defining difference only by looking at a perceived ethnicity is an inaccurate way to portray Alberta teachers. In other words, even if Alberta teachers are mainly of European origin, we can say that teachers' diverse experiences represent the 'many shades of European white'. As a continent, Europe is diverse and the general perception of Canadian teachers simply as being a homogeneous group that can be described as a social construct, is derogatory to teachers' experiences and sense of identity and does not carry the best interest of education to address diversity in the classrooms and schools in a Canadian context (Guess, 2006).

For instance, three out of the four teachers who participated in this study were predominantly of European descent, which speaks to the general origins of teachers currently working in Alberta classrooms as being mainly 'white' (Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009). However, these teachers are quite diverse in terms of backgrounds, ranging from an Eastern European born and trained abroad teacher, who immigrated to Canada, to Canadian-born teachers of European descent who grew up in Alberta, to a teacher of Chinese origin who was born and trained here. Jane and Jocelyn, for example, had similar teacher preparation but their teaching and life experiences were quite different. In addition, some of these teachers were first generation Canadians; Some of them had experience teaching abroad and spoke a second language in addition to English, while others only spoke English and taught in Canada. All these differences among teachers go unnoticed at first glance, but they speak to the overall diversity among teachers.

This study also raises many questions about how effective and fair the hiring process is. The participants also reflected on how principals have been handling the role of recruiting teachers and supporting teachers' ongoing need for growth given the challenges of diversity and comparative performance (Alberta Teachers Association, 2014b; Mason & Schroeder, 2010; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). The study findings, both the literature and the perceptions of our teachers, suggest that some principals might feel insecure and often unprepared to deal with diversity as there are tensions surrounding being "accountable to the public" dependent on the relative performance of one's school (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008, p. 125). The pressure to hire 'the right teacher' for the school, for example, may be related to the principals' need for re-assurance that the right candidate is being chosen.

Overall, diversity among teachers is an important issue in urgent need of addressing as

the assumption that Alberta teachers are not diverse, no longer suits the narrative of changing education to meet the challenge the recent changes in student demographics has posed. The contextualized revisit of how we perceive Canadian teachers is an important step to adapt and possibly improve professional development initiatives, hiring practices and even administrative support to teachers to grow in the context of diversity. The provincial effort to embrace teacher diversity has been quite limited compared to what is offered to students. As these diverse teachers have to deal with all the issues related to students' diversity, not much attention has been given to the teachers' possible mechanisms to cope with such diversity (Alberta Education, 2006; Alberta Teachers Association, 2010).

In the following segment, our participants continue to further their discussions on subsequent standardization in response to diversity and its connection to the business model of education.

The second main question this study echoes is **how are the official attempts by the Ministry of Education responding to this increasing diversity in Alberta classrooms and schools as perceived by the teachers themselves? (Diversity of origin of pupils, teachers and other kinds of diversity)**

This study suggests that coping with the increasing diversity in Alberta classrooms and schools have challenged education and accountability, became an essential instrument to make sense of such diversity (Aitken et al., 2011; Alberta Education, 2006; Alberta Education, 2010a; Solano-Flores & Gustafson, 2013).

The participants suggest that accountability can be perceived through many mechanisms geared towards standardization implemented in diverse contexts such as assessment and professional development initiatives reinforcing these standardized measures. For example, our

four Alberta teachers' remarks strongly suggest that assessment has been in the main, officially preferred professional development and as an official response to diversity as students are constantly being tested, leaving not much time to practice what they have learned before being assessed (Harris et al., 2011). Other debatable measures such as the 'never failing' educational policies, where there is close to no accountability towards students' schoolwork as students are allowed re-take tests and hand in a paper even, for example, a month after the deadline has passed.

It is worth to mention that there are benefits assessing students' learning as it helps teachers to focus on specific students' needs, which can promote student performance (Birenbaum et al., 2015). Some research suggests that often teachers might feel uncomfortable with assessment practices as they might be undertrained to perform such task effectively (Aitken et al., 2011; Birenbaum et al., 2015). However, according to our participants there might be an excessive use of assessment, which does not seem to focus on student learning but rather validating what teachers do in their diverse classrooms. That is to say that there might be a connection between the need to focus mainly on 'testing' students and the need to please a 'tested proof' cultural society, where if there is no testing involved, students do not see the value of or reason to practice or learn something that has been taught (Harris et al., 2011). There is much more to 'assessing' students than just to learn how much students know. Specifically speaking, the excessive use of assessment measures might be related to controlling the diversity of backgrounds, experiences and approaches among teachers, aligned to the concept of a production line in the business model of education.

Our four teacher informants offer the insight that the business model of education favors large often American publishing corporations in Canada, which might discredit teachers'

individual and diverse knowledge and competence in order to sell repackaged educational practices in detriment to educational good (Harris et al., 2011). The study also points to the complexity of sharing similar values and interests as well as differences with our American neighbor in the context of diversity in education. These differences can be seen in many aspects such as the fact that a lot of the published research in Canada rely on American context studies (Banks & Banks, 2004; Milner, 2010; Oaks, 2005). This fact can be problematic especially as diversity in the Canadian educational context and in the American context might carry some very distinct historical differences (McLeod, 1975; Palmer, 1982). The study suggests teaching resources such as teacher guide books and experts focusing on educational topics used in professional development initiatives or to implement summative assessment in schools in Alberta, originated in an American context such as Fountas & Pinnell - Benchmark Assessment System package, is a popular summative assessment tool purchased by many schools in Alberta. There are also some Alberta made assessment guides such as 'Classroom Assessment tool Kit for k-6' (Alberta Education, 2003), which project specifically had the participation of local experts, but the document credits the project management to an Australian consultancy firm (Alberta Education, 2006). Our Alberta teachers suggest that bringing in international consultants seems to give credibility to any initiative as if we lacked qualified local experts to run such projects or if we need an 'international stamp' to give our local initiatives more validity.

Another insight offered by our informants is that accountability has become a central focus on education, and assessment is often the main tool to portray students' learning performances (Harris et al., 2011). Indeed, on other grounds including the actions of the provincial ministry of education as well as school boards, this is not so much an insight as an Alberta commonplace. Accountability has changed the nature of principals' work, which went

from having as the 'principal' teacher, (a more pedagogical role) to become mainly, administrators who manage and overlook many aspects of school life (Harris et al., 2011; Jack & Ryan, 2015; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). Such responsibility is constantly under scrutiny by the school board members and stakeholders, school performance and accountability are intrinsically related as they might influence career advancement and even salary compensation (Alberta Teachers Association, 2014b; Jack & Ryan, 2015; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015).

There might be many reasons for focusing time and resources on assessment, (especially at school level), but our informants as well as the literature suggest two main reasons: The first one would be a general concern in education that teachers are not 'trusted' to be academically and pedagogically fully prepared to assess student learning for the purpose of improving students' performance, which could also justify the focus on assessment through professional development practices, especially, at the school level (Aitken et al., 2011; Birenbaum et al., 2015; Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009). And the second, is the possibility of such assessment practices being simply a mean of controlling the diversity in teachers, regardless of the popular social construct that teachers are mainly 'white', as to standardize teaching hoping to influence student learning outcomes in a time that diversity among students is overwhelming and accountability is key to diverse schools (Alberta Teachers Association, 2014b; Guess, 2005; Harris et al., 2011; Jack & Ryan, 2015; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015)

Diversity versus multiculturalism

One of the unexpected topics raised in this study was the possible difference in meaning between the words diversity and multiculturalism. The four teachers in this study suggest that in the context of education, there is still a lot of confusion around these two discourses as we might be using the word diversity while, in reality, contributing to the perpetuation of the

multiculturalism narrative, which often portray difference by comparing cultures and races and relying on assumptions of identity (Silverman, 2010). As they suggest that there is an underlining limited understanding of 'diversity' related to immigration or people who moved here from other countries and local people who are marginalized and socioeconomically destitute (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008).

Many studies on diversity commonly refer to diversity from a black and white race discourse, such perspective on diversity is often associated to American contextualization of discrimination based on race, which has an impact on education as it may fail to create equal opportunities to different ethnic-cultural minority students of color, and also due to the fact that there is not a single definition for the terms diverse and multiculturalism that would help to distinguish the two terms (Banks & Banks, 2004; Gérin-Lajoie, 2008; Guess, 2006; Milner, 2010; Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009; Silverman, 2010; Syed, 2010). The study is agreeable with the possible difference between multiculturalism and diversity as Silverman (2010) explains that "diversity in the form of race (or ethnicity), gender, and physical disability should be the best indicators of participants' perceptions of multiculturalism " (p. 295).

Multiculturalism is mainly understood as compartmentalizing society into cultures, languages and socio-economic status, as compared to diversity, which meaning is more broad, incorporating individual references such as "identity development and evolution" (Silverman, 2010, p. 296). Diversity, it is often suggested, is a connection with the different aspects of society as a group, as well as individual characteristics, which go beyond visible differences such as race and culture, but rather an overall understanding of what makes us all unique and, gives us a sense of belonging and being, due to a combination of factors.

What does having diversity perceived as multiculturalism for teachers in Alberta imply?

The understanding of diversity commonly presented in American research (namely the black versus white race discourse) might not work the same way in Canada. Canada has its own understanding of diversity as well as its own challenges in embracing such diversity. Alberta education is in principle student-centered, meaning that most of the resources and focus are on the students' needs. Often little attention is given to the professional challenges teachers and other members of the education community might have in adapting to a new reality in the classrooms, in terms of training as well as in the state of mind of teachers under pressure to deliver results without proper conditions. With the advent of increasing immigration in recent years, which has reshaped student demographic, this student-centered education has been questioned as teachers, such as our informants, advocate for a more human-centered approach, meaning a more humanized view of education that includes the diverse and individual needs of students as well as teachers in Alberta. Our teachers strongly suggest that diversity goes beyond the visible differences found in race, culture and socioeconomic factors.

The perceptions of the teachers in this study strongly suggest that diversity is complex in any context. But from an Alberta perspective the complexity of diversity is even more challenging as education is geared towards equality and inclusion of all students that goes beyond the recognition of merely visible differences largely based on race, seemingly widespread in America.

The recent wave of immigration into Canada has changed the dynamics in the classrooms in Alberta, it has become evident that learning the English language for new Canadian students is of special concern and a real challenge. School boards and agencies have been allocating educational resources to address the needs of these ELL students, in some instance, by offering extra specialized help through ELL programs such as L.E.A.D. (Literacy, English and Academic

Development) program through the Calgary Board of Education.

Despite some of the more recent efforts to address the challenges of the increasing diversity of students, studies such as Roessingh and Douglas (2012) point to the fact that ELL students are still academically underperforming their English native speaker peers and also the low student retention and learning outcomes among First Nation students compared to mainstream Alberta students (Hink, 2011; Howe, 2014b).

In addition, more recent PISA results add to the narrative of diversity in education and may indicate that the challenges with the recent increase in immigrants, could be a sign that the tensions in education are far from being resolved, even if some progress has been made (PISA website, 2018). Such progress can perhaps be seen in the many school initiatives focusing on student diversity, which however our teachers suggest, its outreach is limited. The participants suggest that teachers are central in any attempt to implement changes to education; Therefore, the needs of teachers coping with this increase in school diversity are just as important as the students and so far, little attention has been given to teachers' struggles to cope with the current challenges education faces in this increasing diverse scenario. The teachers in this study strongly suggest that their perception is that most teachers are overwhelmed by the external pressures to cope with the diverse students' learning needs and at the same time try to cover the additional administrative demands of the teaching profession.

The recognition of teachers' diversity is important as it speaks to the need to include teachers' perspective in the narrative of diversity actively. In a way, the increasing focus on assessing student learning by provincial authorities, hoping to have a better understanding of the difference among teachers by standardizing what teachers are doing in the classroom, is maybe also part of the response or a way to cope with diversity among teachers.

The challenges imposed by the increasingly diverse student population may also draw attention to the pedagogical and administrative dynamics perceived as a response and, sometimes, a reaction to these new or maybe more complex predicaments in the current education in Canada, and specifically in Alberta.

Educational effectiveness is in demand and careers are at stake. In the current context of diversity, Pollock and Hauseman (2015) argue that not only the teachers' roles but also the principals' work has been influenced by the "high stakes accountability initiatives, national and international competitiveness, and standardized curriculum" (p. 8). Meaning that administrators might feel that standardization is a 'safe niche' as it can provide tangible samples of accountability (Harris et al., 2011). A national Canadian study done by Alberta Teachers Association (2014) seems to support the idea that the changes in the principals' responsibilities is becoming "more demanding, complex and stressful" (p. 25).

Lastly, the participants in this study suggest that the current tendencies of standardizing in education as a part of the official responses to cope with the challenges of the growing diverse classrooms in Alberta could have a connection to the business model of education. As education focuses on developing products that take away the individuality of teaching and learning to replace it with a 'one fits all' model that can be accountable for. The standardization of educational practices has often been proven to be ineffective due to the fact that it might not address the complexity of teaching and learning of a variety of students with a wide range of needs (Dee & Jacob, 2011; Harris, 2011).

The third question this study seeks to answer is: **How do high school teachers presently manage their own professional growth in the context of both this increasing diversity and the increasing provincial attempts responding to this in order to manage such diversity?**

Reflecting on attempts to cope with diversity in Alberta schools, our four high school teachers expressed their views on teacher education, specifically teacher preparation, and their experiences with professional development practices, especially, effectiveness in professional development initiatives and issues of collaboration and trust with other teachers.

Teacher education

Overall, the teachers in this study recall their teacher preparation mostly as a theoretical experience, which did not have much impact on their current classroom practice for a few reasons. Although, they agree that teacher education may change over time, overall these teachers question the applicability of the theoretical content they learned while attending their Teacher preparation program, as such programs seem to be disconnected from their classroom experience (Falkenberg, Goodnough, & MacDonald, 2014; Howe, 2014a; Towers, 2013). For instance, Maria said that she felt the theoretical nature of the courses she took both in Bulgaria and Alberta were both disconnected to the classroom reality.

The participants also suggest that the changes in the classroom are much more rapid and dynamic, especially in the context of increasing diversity, than the changes and adaptations of the courses taught at the university level in order to make such courses an effective pedagogical advantage as teachers' transition into contemporary classrooms. "Sink or swim" is a well-known saying among student-teachers going into the field after successfully finishing their course work (Howe, 2014a, p. 594).

Some studies suggest that some student-teachers believe that the theoretical background acquired in these courses will have covered, to a certain extent, what happens in the classroom and some might even try to incorporate what they have learned as a student teacher in their practice (Howe, 2014a; Towers, 2015). Namely, some student-teachers might assume that if you

do well in your coursework you should be able to handle a classroom without major problems. However, the reality is that when student-teachers transition into the actual classroom teaching, the process is often problematic as they are usually not ready to manage the workload and tasks expected of practicing teachers, requiring extra professional support such as mentorship (Howe, 2014a). The participants also suggested that the fast pace of teaching does not leave much time to reflect on why teachers do things the way they do or even if there would be a better way of doing things. That is to say, time to reflect on what these teachers can learn and implement in their practice from theoretical reflection (Hammerness et al., 2012).

Both the insights of our four informants as well as the literature reviewed suggest the need for more interactive approaches between researchers and teachers, and partnership opportunities with mutual academic and pedagogical benefits. Although, many educational scholars might have been teachers at some point in their careers, little attention has been given to account for their experiences as faculty members teaching student-teachers, in addition to the many other responsibilities aside from teaching such as publishing, supervising and doing research (Ellis et al., 2012; Hale & Clark, 2016).

In summation, these four Alberta teachers all point to the disconnect between theory and practice as a weak element in their teacher preparation. The detachment between research and teachers' theoretical understanding and classroom practice is one of the main obstacles to teachers' growth through teacher education. An effective relationship between these two vital aspects of education, theory and practice, is essential to the creation of critical, engaging and transformative education.

Professional development practices

In recent years, due to the fact that the implementation of educational reforms mainly

depends on the teachers' adherence and implementation, the search for effective professional development practices have become a constant inquiry in research (Broad & Evans, 2006; Grimmett, 2014; Little, 1993; Opfer & Pedder, 201; Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

Professional development has become a popular topic, especially, among administrators. Our teachers, on the other hand, suggest that generally speaking, teachers are not always keen or enthusiastic about the professional development they receive regularly through the schools. The four high school teachers in this study, point to the fact that professional development initiatives, often perceive teachers as passive recipients of knowledge, especially through the popular 'One Size Fits All' professional development model, as they rarely validate teachers' lived experiences or support their own notion of professional learning growth needs (Freire, 1970). This suggests that teacher professional development hardly ever offers opportunities for professional growth, and this is precisely how our participants presented professional development as they had experienced it (Bautista & Ortega-Ruíz, 2015; Opfer & Pedder, 201; Villegas-Reimer, 2003).

These Canadian teachers suggest that administrators do not seem to fully understand what teachers need to learn in the context of their classroom experiences, failing to provide teachers with the necessary support through effective professional development to grow and improve their teaching practice. The importance of well-thought and implemented has become evident as professional development much more than just an 'event' but a career long process in which teachers must develop and grow as a professional educator (Harwell, 2003; Rose, 2012). According to Fielding and Schalock (1985) who suggest that it is essential for principals to be "teaching leaders", "knowledgeable about current issues in curriculum and instruction and, take an active role in teacher in-service programs" (p. 32) for school success in order to be effective in his role.

In a sense, administrators, who are often former teachers transitioning into an ever-changing administrative position as principals, with both administrative and teacher instructing roles, have also been struggling to make sense of the diversity in education and what this means to their role as a principal (Alberta Teachers Association, 2014b; Fredua-Kwarteng, 2013; Jack & Ryan, 2015). Thus, the education of administrators has also become a concern as many do not seem to fully understand the importance of teachers professional experiences, and subsequently inputs into their own professional growth to the overall success of education, as often teachers are placed as "passive recipients of skills and learning" in most professional development practices provided by schools is part of an administrator's role of providing instruction to these teachers (Alberta Teachers Association, 2014, p. 49).

If the insights of our four informants are right, officially sanctioned professional development as experiences in our schools, often does not promote educators' professional growth, especially at the school level. While most of professional development practices are implemented in schools, our teachers suggest that these initiatives lack a connection with the challenges that teachers have in their classroom contexts. Teachers are seen more as mere recipients of the information that the school or district administrators judge they need to know, to improve teaching outcomes rather than as participants in the processes of professional development with an opportunity to offer their own insights and suggestions to the development itself. The participants in this study also point to the fact that they see an 'excessive' focus on assessment through students testing, and especially, professional development, regardless if some studies suggest that there are some concerns on how trained teachers are to implement effective assessment practices (Aitken et al., 2011; Birenbaum et al., 2015; Rose, 2013). The four Alberta teachers also bring some attention to the importance of the preparation of principals in order for

them to perform their roles as administrators as well as instructor leaders to improve their practices in tasks such as teacher hiring and providing effective professional development to teachers.

Professional growth and 'administrivia'

The participants in this study were quite clear about what they think professional growth is by suggesting that teacher professional growth is a rich and diverse process, in which teachers learn something important to them and this new knowledge influences positively their practice (Alberta education, 2015). However, such approach to professional growth practices contrasts with the traditional professional methods such as 'One Size Fits All', commonly used in professional development models implemented in school settings (Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

Our Alberta teachers suggest that, often, professional growth is not obtained through professional development initiatives. As these teachers repeatedly argue, the main issue with school professional development, especially mandated ones, is that they are mostly focused on what Jocelyn calls 'administrivia', meaning enforcing an administrative agenda usually directed towards standardization and assessment. As discussed previously, some studies suggest that assessment is an important factor in improving learning outcomes but often overlooked in teacher preparation programs. Such studies may, to a certain extent, justify having assessment as a central point for professional development initiatives in schools, and may also support the public perception that, often, teachers do not have the comprehensive training and understanding of assessment (Aitken et al., 2011; Birenbaum et al., 2015; Rose, 2013). However, the participants also believe that there is an excessive focus on assessment which may be connected to diversity and accountability by administrators trying to control what teachers do in the classroom.

Another recurring topic in this study, in terms of continuing teacher professional growth,

was the teachers' perspectives on what could be the most effective professional development approach. A variety of answers emerged from the four Alberta teachers, but mainly these answers point to a diversity of learning needs among teachers geared towards diverse classroom teaching and classroom realities, which influence the teachers' need for professional growth (Avalos, 2011). These needs range from being provided with effective professional development initiatives by schools and school districts, to participating further in self-initiated professional development practices. Such PD practices are described as teachers being trusted with their own learning; For example, in using their time to collaborate with colleagues in the same school or in other schools, or pursuing larger educational conferences on topics of interest administered by outside agencies or even abroad, which require the school district to cover the teachers' expenses (Avalos, 2011). Maria recalls fondly her experience in Bulgaria, where she had the trust of her principal to choose once a week to collaborate with colleagues or simply go to the library and research various pedagogical topics of interest, and have the freedom to choose how best to use her professional development time and being her own judge of what she needs to learn as a teacher. As for Jane, our most experienced teacher, she says that going back to university after so many years of teaching, was the best form of professional development for her and wished she had done it earlier in her career. Nonetheless, after teaching for over 30 years, Jane argues that her experience as a graduate student was positive and that both theory and practice are important factors in teachers' growth.

Our teacher informants suggest that the ineffectiveness of most professional development practices, is the disconnection between what teachers actually need to know in their practice, and what is being taught by experts through professional development who are often, education-wise, well-qualified but usually do not have much classroom experience or a clear picture of the

different classroom contexts and the challenges teachers are currently facing (Bautista & Ortega-Ruíz, 2015; Villegas-Reimers, 2003). The participants reiterate that teachers are instrumental to any educational policy implementations (Bautista & Ortega-Ruíz, 2015; Guskey, 2002; Villegas-Reimers, 2003) and teachers' professional growth is crucial to the success of education. The role of teachers has become more complex as our students' learning needs are increasingly more diverse (Bautista & Ortega-Ruíz, 2015). Glatthorn (1995) and Villegas-Reimers (2003) associate teacher professional development to professional growth. However, the participants in this study emphasize that often professional development does not necessarily lead to professional growth, especially mandated professional development initiatives implemented in schools. The participants suggest that PDs are just another administrative related responsibility which teachers have to attain in addition to teaching. These kinds of professional development practices often do not have an impact on their teaching practice and do not promote professional growth. The teachers also point to important factors that impact the effectiveness of professional development such as the acknowledgement of teachers' experiences and educational contexts (Fielding & Schalock, 1985; Ganser, 2000; Villegas-Reimers, 2003).

The participants in this study also suggest that the professional development practices that are effective and promote professional growth, are the ones where they can explore their real learning needs (Avalos, 2011). The preferred format of what the participants consider effective professional development initiatives, a but central to their needs, such as attending large conferences or even going to different schools to collaborate with other teachers (which may require a substitute teacher coming in or even travel costs) are examples of the most meaningful PDs for these teachers. Such professional development practices however are usually more costly, especially when compared to the costs of in-service professional development practices

run by administrators. These teachers suggest that economic factors (not necessarily educational reasoning) might be why, even if deemed more effective, are often not encouraged or popular among school administrators (Fielding & Schalock, 1985).

Conclusion

This study might suggest that the nature of Alberta education is diverse as we offer multiple approaches to what is perceived to be the goal of education, meeting different perspectives to 'what is important to know' as well as 'how this knowledge is taught' (Winchester, 2002).

In a time where student performance is being scrutinized by Canadian society, often, based on international ranks like PISA, diversity and accountability have challenged education. The participants in this study argue that the efforts to address the increasing diverse classrooms in Alberta have been focused mainly on students, regardless that everyone in education has been affected by such challenges, especially teachers. This observation is quite important as it affects many different aspects of teachers' professional experiences, such as hiring practices, teacher preparation programs, and the lived experiences of teachers with professional development. All these factors might be framed by an understanding of subtle differences between the terms multiculturalism and diversity, which might also inform us of how American contextualized issues of race and social justice in education overflow and inform Canadian education (Bank & Banks, 2004; Gérin-Lajoie, 2012; Guess, 2006; Milner, 2010; Syed, 2010).

Alberta teachers and likely administrators (as former teachers) are diverse in their experiences as this study suggests as well as Janusch's (2015) study, where she describes the experiences of four teachers, primarily, trained abroad navigating the teaching hiring practices in Calgary after receiving their teacher certification. Studies such as Wiltse (2005) suggest that

Alberta students are very diverse and do not fit the multicultural understanding of diversity as defined by the 'white teachers, teaching destitute students of color' narrative, which may be inspired by the ethnic, socioeconomic and cultural struggles often described in American literature and emulated in Canadian diverse literature (Bank & Banks, 2004; Gérin-Lajoie, 2012; Milner, 2010; Syed, 2010).

The study suggests that one of the probable reasons why some of the American trends in education, spill into Canada, influencing our understanding of our own contextualized Canadian diversity (especially in the context of education) could be the fact that Canada and the United States, historically, share similar interests in terms of mainstream Anglo-Saxon culture such as the dominant use of the English language (Palmer, 1982). However, these two neighboring countries have some significant differences in terms of how they look at diversity. While Americans seem to focus more on racial differences between those who are of European descent and other denominational races (defined as dark skinned or black people), which sometimes impact these destitute marginalized sections of American society by restraining egalitarian socioeconomic opportunities due to the supposed low quality of education these non-European students might receive (Milner, 2010). In Canada, the issues with diversity, related to education, can be mostly noticed through the complex process of Anglo-Saxon culture and values through the curriculum and educational policies (Palmer, 1982), which might also impact socioeconomically and cultural minority groups, such as indigenous groups who are often considered English Language Learners.

The popular mosaic image of the 70's implies that Canada is a multicultural nation, where different cultural groups dwell harmoniously, does not address the different struggles Canadians face to come to terms with their own diversity (Palmer, 1982). As Guo (2011) suggests Alberta

education still struggles to address or involve immigrant parents' concerns regarding students' learning dynamics in schools, especially when it comes to religious concerns, suggests that for Muslim parents, as an example, the struggle is even more apparent (Guo, 2012).

In the context of the increasing diversity in Alberta classrooms, another issue this study addresses, is how education is coping with the change in the student demographic and how it affects classroom practices, policies and even teacher education. During almost two decades Alberta students kept a PISA successful record in reading, math and science scores, when the inquiry- based learning curriculum was introduced in the nineties. Country-wise, Canada is still among the top 10 high academic performers (PISA website), even if in recent years Canadian students' PISA scores showed some decline or tendency for flatness. Again, this might be due to the impact of adapting to a fast-changing student population, which has become increasingly more demanding in terms of students' needs, which include anything from mental health challenges to learning disabilities and English Language Learning. Such factors acknowledged in Canadian diversity have challenged the historical understanding of diversity in Canada seen in educational policies, which favored Anglo-Canadian social and cultural values (including Christian religious values) assimilation by new immigrants (Alberta Education, 2010b; Alberta Teachers Association, 2009; Alberta Teachers Association, 2014a).

In terms of educational policies addressing these challenges, education seems to be focusing more on accountability (Harris et al., 201; Pollock & Hauseman, 2015). This factor is suggested to be linked to the increasing diversity in schools and has affected and added new challenges to the role of teachers and also principals. In the case of principals, who in Alberta are former teachers, the features of their work have been changing in recent years and becoming much more complex, demanding principals be responsible for both an extensive realm of

administrative duties and teacher instruction, in other parts of the country as well as in Alberta (Fredua-Kwarteng, 2013; Jack & Ryan, 2015).

In terms of teacher education, namely teacher preparation, as well as professional development practices in the context of current diversity in the classrooms in Alberta, the study suggests that there seems to be (in the case of teacher education) a continuing struggle to bridge the theory learned through university courses, and the lived experiences of teachers in the classrooms, as teachers often do not find much applicability for such theoretical knowledge as they become teacher practitioners (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008).

Professional development practices, as a form of continuing teacher education, have also become very important as, in theory, it is one of the main tools of helping teachers to improve teaching performance. However, our teachers suggest that the problems with professional development, especially the mandated ones in schools, are complex as they perceive that most practices are focused on the standardization of teachers' learning, implementation of school policies and initiatives (seen as necessary by school administrators) often do not address the needs of teachers for professional growth (Grimmett, 2014; Harwell, 2003; Little, 1993; Opfer & Pedder, 2011).

Summarizing, there seems to be a tendency in Alberta education to implement standardizing practices through hiring processes as it often looks at teacher-candidates from the perspective of the 'good teacher' concept. Also, most professional development initiatives are based on traditional approaches to teacher learning, that is to say that teachers are seen as the recipient of learning, rather than as active agents seeking professional growth as such professional initiatives follow the 'One Size Fits All' model and focus on assessment practices (Freire, 1970). This may also be a part of the response to challenges of the increasing diversity in

the classrooms in Alberta, as standardization can be falsely perceived as a way to promote accountability and improve learning outcomes (Harris, 2011).

Overall, the issues raised in this study perhaps give us a better sense of some of the challenges that teachers and the educational community are going through in these rapidly changing times to cope with the increasing diversity in Alberta schools. One might hope that to a certain extent, there is a recognition of the many nuances concerning diversity in our schools and the necessary embracing in an inclusive way the diversity not only among students but also among teachers, principals and even parents. All these factors together point to the tensions in the contextualized Alberta classrooms today. It is important to note that while the numerous interesting insights gained from our four teacher informants cannot be generalized in any statistical sense to the teacher population as a whole, many of the insights our teachers provided appear to be of such importance that further research to follow up on their degree of generality might well be useful.

Philosophical reflections

Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher who contributed to the refinement of today's complex discussions especially in education, has suggested that men are the only beings capable of contributing to debates and narratives, and mainly put forward compelling perspectives on complex topics. Therefore, my intention is not to portray the findings as a fixed sole 'truth' but rather give a glimpse of understanding as to what is in the minds of some of the teachers currently teaching in the province of Alberta.

As a researcher, one of the main lessons I learned as I worked on this complex research paper, was that as Ely et al. (1997) and Wiltse (2006) suggest, initial literature review does not always engage with the final findings of a study. Namely, the initial assumptions supported by

the literature review that might have been used to guide the research do, not always match the research findings.

Saint-Exupéry (1943) reminds us that "Droit devant soi on ne peut pas aller bien loin..." (p. 15), that is to say that in education, one will not go too far if one looks straight ahead or considers only a single perspective. Keeping a humble learning growth mindset was essential to reflect on the need to further review and expand the literature in order to keep true to the data and most likely contribute to the current knowledge in the field, especially in areas that are under-researched such as the one in this study.

I want to invite the reader to consider the broadness of narratives in the experiences of the four teachers in this study that are not always popular and/or find its space in Canadian research as Crocker and Dibbon (2008) state that "much of the growing body of literature on teacher preparation comes from the United States whose context is vastly different from Canada" (p. 11).

Diversity was a central point in this study. What is diversity? And how does it relate to the current experiences of teachers teaching in the classrooms in Alberta? Reflecting on these two questions helped me to frame the study around exploring what diversity really means to these four teachers, instead of theorizing a definition and establishing my research baseline for interpreting the data. The teachers' answers to what diversity was split into two interconnected parts. The first part was the personal level of such identity, and secondly the professional level, what can be seen as the teachers share their views on how they made sense of the curriculum, educational policies, students and school culture in the context of diversity and finally followed by how such understandings of diversity, affect or even shape their practice.

Having chosen a grounded theoretical approach in this multiple case study, it was extremely helpful to let the data 'speak' and allow the participants to decisively form the study

theory, which emerged from these reflective conversations among the four teachers in this study. The understandings and perspectives of these teachers on their pedagogical growth in the contexts of diversity were different, and I was able to compile their contributions and later sort them into a few educational topics. The data was formed by a compilation of these teachers' reflections on their assumptions and biases as they decided on a teaching career. The teachers share their experiences during their teacher preparation, where they got acquainted with educational theories and tried to make sense of it as they did their practice. The teachers in this study explained that this learning process was continued as they embarked on their journey to being hired, where they often experienced the complexity in an amplitude of answers to the question 'what makes a good teacher'.

Another fruitful reason I used a constructive grounded theoretical framework to this multiple case study, was that it would be ideal to better understand the complexity of these four teachers' cases and allow me to focus on the data (Charmaz, 2006; Mitchell, 2014), not as a measure of providing a teacher demographic account as often happens in quantitative approaches, but rather build an accurate understanding of the different perspectives of such teachers' as they navigate the current challenges in education, creating a "theory based on their [the] interactions with the participants" (Mitchell, 2014, p.1).

At the end of the data analysis, a theory arose clearly and persistently; The participants' information provided in this study strongly suggests the theory that teachers do not have much influence on the decision-making processes that often impact their professional duties and growth such as professional development practices, teacher education at the university level, and educational policies. After much reflection on what the findings in this study indicated, my understand is that there is an overall change process in need or on the making in the current state

where education in Alberta stands, starting by revisiting our understanding of diversity in a more focused Canadian context, including not only students but teachers, parents, administrators and the whole educational community in this reflective process. Such inclusive way of materializing diversity in Alberta would be of key importance to policy and educational initiatives, offering an effective tool to create adequate support to teachers and administrators as well as curriculum guidelines and teacher preparation.

Interestingly as I was analyzing the data in this study, I observed that some of the perceptions of these teachers on identity might indicate that teacher identity is sometimes problematic as it is not often discussed and/or reflected on. One of the teachers in this study, Jocelyn, who is visibly of European descent said that she often felt uncomfortable addressing diversity. or even question her own identity, as was just a 'white teacher'. Especially among 'white' teachers, there seems to be a sense of shame to questioning their own sense of identity, as there is a general understanding that these teachers are 'just a white teachers' and the general perception of Canadian teachers as 'white', affected the way teachers saw themselves. These teachers also reflected and shared their views on how professional development practices are responding to teachers' professional needs for learning and growing as practitioners. All these different matters in education were important to these four Alberta teachers, and their perceptions and knowledge should contribute to enrich our understanding of their professional growth in the context of diversity in the classrooms in Alberta.

After much reflection on what the findings in this study indicated, my understanding was that an overall change in processes is needed as the current state of education stands in Alberta, starting by revisiting our understanding of diversity in a more focused Canadian context, including not only students but teachers, parents, administrators and the whole educational

community in this reflective process. An inclusive way of materializing diversity in Alberta would be of key importance to policy and educational initiatives, offering an effective tool to create adequate support for teachers and administrators as well as curriculum guidelines and teacher preparation.

Currently, most of the literature informing some of the professional practices and educational initiatives in Canada is contextualized in the US (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). Historically, as previously discussed, American education has been influenced by the different narratives of race, while in Canada, this process was done mainly through assimilation to the Anglo-Canadian culture and English language (McLeod, 1975; Palmer, 1982). As our student demographic is increasing rapidly our assumptions of diversity and how to make sense of it through assimilation might no longer be valid. Education in Canada is going through a process of revisiting the past to make sense of the present in order to address the present challenges in education. By exploring, in a meaningful way different narratives of diversity beyond the narrowing and exclusive narratives of race and social justice which often are solely based on the visible aspects of diversity, education can effectively further the efforts to address the current challenges in education, specifically in Alberta. It could also address a growing need for revisiting our assumptions of a generalized form of Canadian identity, historically justified in assimilation of Anglo-Canadian values and beliefs and based on visible stereotyped aspects of culture and socioeconomic status.

My thoughts are that by judging how diverse teachers, students or per say parents, or even principals, is by the color of their skin, or based on our cultural assumptions, only narrows our understanding of diversity, built on prejudices and aggravates the present challenges experienced in education. The color of skin of a teacher should not be the main or often sole

indicator as to whether or not a teacher may have experienced trauma, poverty or struggled with personal issues that may impact their teaching practice on a professional or personal level. For example, a European-born but raised in Canada teacher could have experienced war in Kosovo prior to moving to Canada at a young age, where visible traces of the past, such as a European accent might have disappeared and all that's left, is the social construct of 'whiteness' to characterize how diverse this teacher is and judge how she could relate to the experiences of diverse students coming from Syria or other parts of the world (Guess, 2006). Another example would be stereotyping African-Canadian teachers implying that whoever comes from Africa where everybody is destitute and has experienced war is the same. Race is definitely a complicated means to measure diversity, which has been contested by Science as we all know that DNA research has proven that there is no such thing as a 'pure race'; However, we still use the color of skin as an indicator to determine how diverse a teacher is. Such perspectives on diversity are most likely borrowed from other contexts, often American contextualized studies. If that is the way we perceive diversity, this is not any different than any other form of selective racism, which is often used to address the same subject.

In terms of Canadian research, Wiltse's (2005) study both confronts and resonates this idea of selective diversity as being the minority group of under-privileged students in a school. In her study, she describes the European descent students as a minority, so the question is, what is diversity? Are these minority students diverse, even though they are considered 'white' through the lens of race?

Critical theorists such as Paulo Freire (1970), Peter McLaren (1994), and Henry Giroux (1988) have had an important role in adequately addressing contextualized historical and cultural issues related to diversity through the lens of social justice among visible minorities around the

world. Importantly, critical theoretical approaches in a Canadian context have also been used as a tool to promote awareness of historical, social and cultural issues, especially among minority communities such as indigenous students and English Language Learners, inquiring as to why these students continue to academically underperform their peers in the educational scenario in Canada (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008; 2012; Howe, 2014b; Roessingh & Douglas, 2012).

The tension lies in the complexity of generalizing such critical views in an educational context. For example, in Canada, I noticed that critical literature often refers to Canadian teachers as 'white, middle-class and female', denying these teachers the proper right to be seen as individuals with an identity that might be respected beyond our assumptions of "whiteness" (Gérin-Lajoie, 2008; Guess, 2005; 2012; Ryan, Pollock, & Antonelli, 2009). While recognizing the importance of critically analyzing the challenges that our diverse Canadian educational community experience, addressing the issues through racism and discrimination solely is counter-productive as it creates an environment which nourishes a race face-off narrative, and more importantly denies the right and the responsibility of visibly 'white' teachers to investigate their own 'whiteness' and their sense of identity within an increasingly diverse Canadian society. After all, these generalized 'visibly white teachers', seen in the majority of classrooms all over Canada, might also have stories to tell; Even if many generations have passed, their ancestors might have been European pioneers who, at some point, were also immigrants that moved to Canada seeking a better life. Although such pioneer descendents might have established themselves in Canada, it does not mean, that given the opportunity, these Canadian teachers might reclaim their stories and make sense of their own identity, which might contribute to an overall understanding of Canada as a country of immigrants in past and in the present. Courtland and Gonzalez (2013) suggest that teachers' reflections on their own identity is very important to

the professional growth of teachers and essential to education, especially in diverse contexts such as Alberta.

In addition, education in Alberta would benefit from further investigating how diversity is being portrayed as our views on diversity affect curriculum, teacher education, educational interactions in the educational community and, finally, influence educational policies that directly or indirectly affect teaching and consequently student learning outcomes.

In conclusion, exploring a variety of understandings of diversity, especially the ones that go beyond the assumption of race as a key factor of people's identity, will likely influence some other very important aspects of education which the teachers in this study uncovered such as historical cultural biases and educational beliefs, often guides hiring practices in Canadian research and programs in teacher education as well as professional development practices. These factors add to the complexity of social and cultural construct often wrongly framed in research around the dichotomy of race, which by no means should solely define diversity in Canada.

The impact of the increasing diversity in the classrooms in Alberta and how it affects teachers' practices, professional growth and education in general is still under-researched. Most of what is available in terms of research is decontextualized and it borrows from the extensive complex problems faced by school teachers on the south side of the border, especially in terms of conflicting diversity related mainly by the 'race' focus on the black and white duality and its subsequent social justice issues and dilemmas. I do not imply that in Canada we are completely free from these issues but the dichotomy between black and white is not certainly as evident here as it is in United States (Guo, 2012; Wiltse, 2006).

Recommendations

The insights offered by the teachers in this study suggest three main recommendations:

1. Review of educational hiring practices.

The participants suggest that ineffective teacher hiring practices contribute to some of the problems education faces. They cite a few practices they have noticed to exemplify their point:

First, the participants say that hiring practices often do not validate teachers' professional perceptions of experiences or education, as most principals hire teachers they already know or are recommended by other colleagues. While some principals might believe that they are hiring the "best" teacher for the job, research suggests that what constitutes the term "best" in hiring practices is a "subjective construct" (Jack & Ryan, 2015, pp. 65-66).

The participants emphasize that hiring is, often, based on principals' personal trait perceptions of what the best candidate is, and sometimes, these principals delegate the teacher hiring screening to a colleague to appoint the right teacher candidate for the position; Sadly, the professional qualifications of the teacher candidates' become secondary and sometimes irrelevant, as some principals believe that a teachers personal traits are vital to choosing 'the right' teacher candidate (Harris et al., 201; Jack & Ryan, 2015; Mason & Schroeder, 2010).

The teachers in this study suggest that to a certain extent your teacher qualifications are irrelevant, because if your hiring principal or recruiter think that you are, for example "too experienced" you could pose a challenge to their school leadership, they will not hire you, no matter how qualified or experienced you are. According to Cranston (2015), over the years studies have pointed to the fact that the hiring practices based on stereotypization and personal trait preferences, "gut feelings" and "best guesses" on the part of the interviewer, are ineffective and a detrimental method to assess "teachers professional capabilities, as many other important aspects of the applicant's professional portfolio can go unnoticed" (p. 129). For instance, research found that some principals might take, on average, 20 minutes to assess the teacher's effective

classroom likelihood. And even more surprising, that some principals believe it's possible to assess a teacher's classroom effectiveness by analyzing a single email (Cranston, 2015).

Currently, the hiring of principals and school leaders is usually based on career teachers' pursuit of further education and involvement in school committees as opposed to connected to professional excellence and teaching performance (Rose, 2013).

Overall, in a time when accountability has become central to education, principals' reliance on ineffective hiring practices have come under scrutiny as hiring decisions are being made based on groundless beliefs, which lack substantial supporting information, such practices add to the current challenges in education (Cranston, 2015).

A review of the current hiring practices indicate that prioritizing teacher experience and specific education is an important factor in hiring effective teachers, while conflicting hiring procedures limit the search for teacher candidates with combined experience and education to occupy a specific job position (Cranston, 2015). As newly hired teachers are usually on probationary contracts for the first year, the principal might have the time to observe some other aspects he or she judges important, but what the principal considers important and will be observed in the newly hired teacher should be clear from the beginning of the hiring process. The review should also consider a reevaluation of the current hiring practices and proper training for principals and vice-principals on research based effective hiring practices, as the participants suggest most principals have a limited understanding of research and lack the necessary skills to provide teachers with effective professional development practices.

2. Expand collaboration between schools and universities.

The participants in this study point to a disconnect between the theoretical content of teacher preparation courses and their applicability to the perceived lived experiences of

practitioners. They suggest that part of the problem might be that most of the research on teacher education used in Canada is American, despite the fact that Canadian educational context is different from the American one (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008).

The teachers in this study point to their teacher preparation, more specifically, their theoretical background acquired through the university courses they took and how this knowledge was largely unrelated or obsolete as they became teachers (Falkenberg, 2010). Research suggests that there are signs that some universities currently are trying to bridge theoretical knowledge and the experiences of practitioners as some teaching programs, for example, offering student-teachers the opportunity to do their practicum abroad to gain teaching experience in a different cultural context (Cantalini-Williams et al., 2014). But these learning experiences are quite limited and problematic at times as student-teachers do not anticipate things such as cost and cultural expectations. The institutions do not always offer a specific course in preparation for this kind of practicum (Cantalini-Williams et al., 2014). The participants also agree that more recently there have been some attempts to address these discrepancies between theory and practice in the teachers' educational context (Falkenberg, Goodnough, & MacDonald, 2014). However, they say that there is still a significant gap between what they learn as a student-teacher and the skills and abilities they are required to have as teachers.

Ultimately, this study points to the importance of a mutually beneficial collaborative approach among school administrators, scholars as well as teachers' in developing effective university programs and professional development initiatives, especially in the context of diversity in Alberta schools (Crocker & Dibbon, 2008). Such benefits could be, for example, the collaboration among researchers and teachers which could lead to expansion in the research-related work in Canada, supporting universities and professional development programs to

provide Canadian teachers with adequate contextualized theoretical knowledge, skills and abilities to better prepare them to teach, especially, in the current challenging diverse classrooms context in Alberta.

3. Further research on contextualized professional growth of teachers.

The participants point to the fact that there is not much published research addressing the teachers' perceived needs for professional growth, especially, in a Canadian context.

Fielding and Schalock (1985) suggest that the disconnection between professional development experts and teachers can be seen in the different understanding of what is important to learn in order to improve teaching outcomes based on priority views or values as those in charge of professional development might focus on things such as "long range planning and the achievement of long-range outcomes, whereas teachers tend to be more concerned with the quality of day-to-day life in the classroom" (p. 21). The gap between professional development focus and teachers' perceived learning needs have not effectively been bridged over the years (Fielding & Schalock, 1985).

While there are plenty of articles on teacher professional development (Bautista & Ortega-Ruiz, 2015; Hargreaves, 2003; Harwell, 2003; Kohli et al., 2015; Little, 1993; Rodrigues, 2005; Villegas-Reimers, 2003), there is a need for further research investigating the process of teachers' professional growth (Opfer & Pedder, 2011). One of the participants says that as a graduate student she met some scholars whose ideas were similar to the way teachers see their professional growth, but she suggests that these kind of research topics, for some reason, even if important to teachers, are not being published (Kezar, 2008). Some studies suggest that the politics of education have been influencing higher education contexts as "campuses have become increasingly politicized based on the corporatization and commercialization of the higher

education enterprise, resource constraint, and the growing encroachment of outside groups" (Hearn, 1996; Kezar, 2001 in Kezar, 2008, p. 410). Kezar (2008) suggests that there is a disconnection between scholars and teachers in higher education. In some universities, there is a kind of discomfort with certain topics in academia that could be seen as controversial and might draw some concerns from university administration as these controversial topics could impact things such as future funding for research.

In conclusion, this study points to the need for further Canadian contextualized research to extensively scrutinize the rapid changes in education and its impact on teacher professional growth and its implications on teacher education programs and research in Canada.

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Appendices

A. Research Ethics Board Approval Letter



RESEARCH ETHICS OFFICE

308 Campus Tower
Edmonton, AB, Canada T6G 1K8
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Notification of Approval - Amendment

Date: April 5, 2019
Principal Investigator: Daniela D'arc Fontenele Tereschuk
Study ID: Pro00051465
Study Title: Exploring Teachers' Experiences and Perceptions into Professional Growth in Diverse Classrooms in Alberta
Supervisor: Ingrid Johnston
Approved Consent Form: Approval Date: 8/1/2015 Approved Document: Information Letter and Consent Form - Revised
Approval Expiry Date: Friday, April 12, 2019

Thank you for submitting an amendment request to the Research Ethics Board 1. This amendment has been reviewed and approved on behalf of the committee. The following has been approved: change of project title

Sincerely,

Anne Walley
REB Specialist, Research Ethics Board 1

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system).

B. Data

Wallmap.

Research Questions

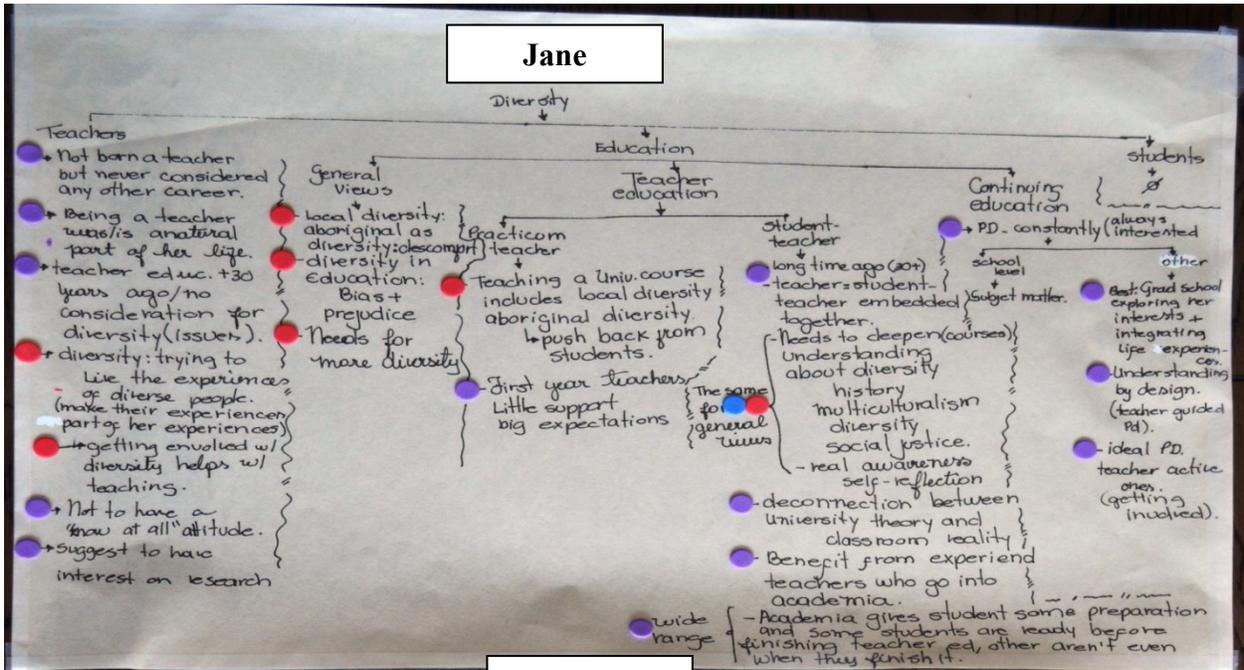
- ① What are experiences of Edmonton High School teachers with the increasing diversity in their classrooms and schools?
- ② How the official attempts of standardization in the High School context of both this increasing diversity in their classrooms and schools are perceived by teachers themselves? (diversity of origins of pupils, teachers and other kind of diversity)
- ③ How high school teachers presently manage their own professional growth in the context of both this increasing diversity and the increasing provincial attempts of standardization to manage such diversity?

My assumptions

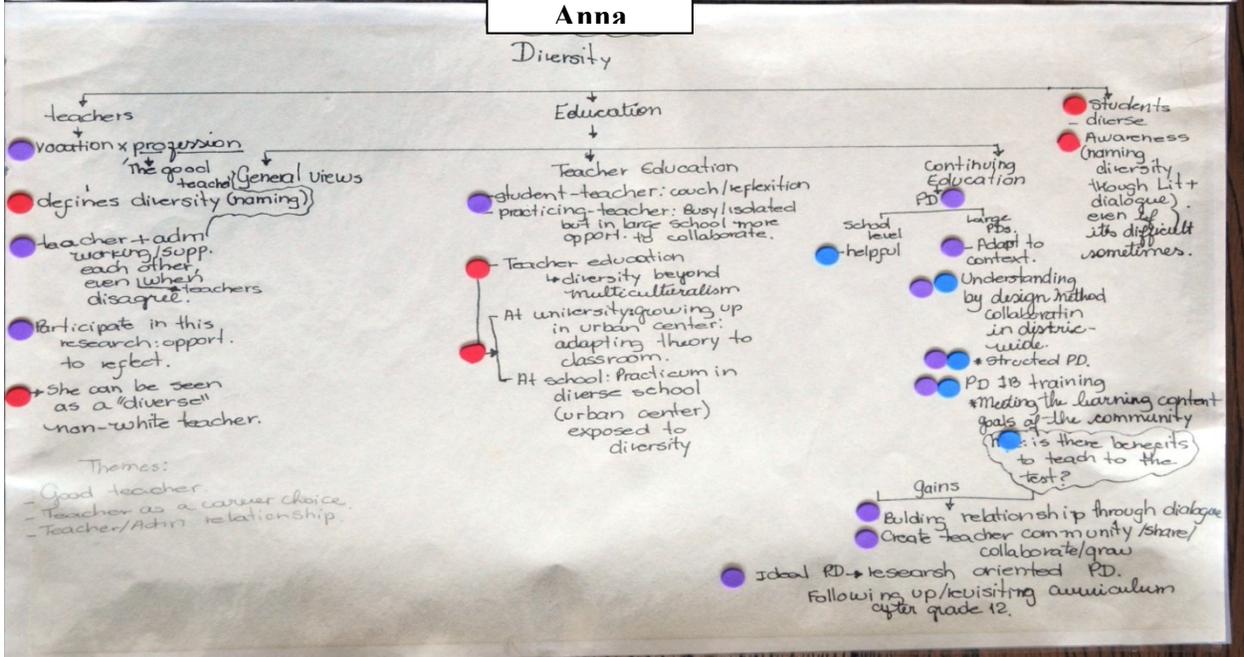
- ① Teachers in Edmonton and Calgary and teachers around the province of Alberta generally will experience increasing diversity and increasing standardization requirements in much the same way. (assessment emphases, the location of new students from around the world who do not speak English).
- ② The researcher assumes that discussion from a limited number of teachers in any jurisdiction one will gain insight, not statistic validity, into the experiences and perceptions of teachers that are likely to be the same anywhere in the province and certainly in both Edmonton and Calgary.

Questionnaire & individual interviews

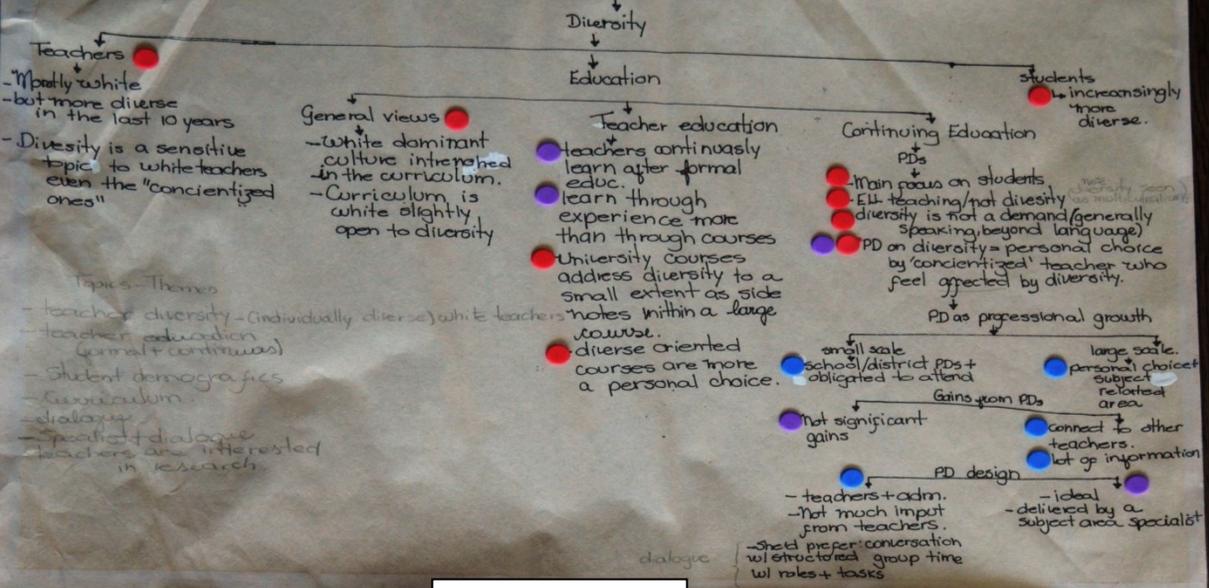
Jane



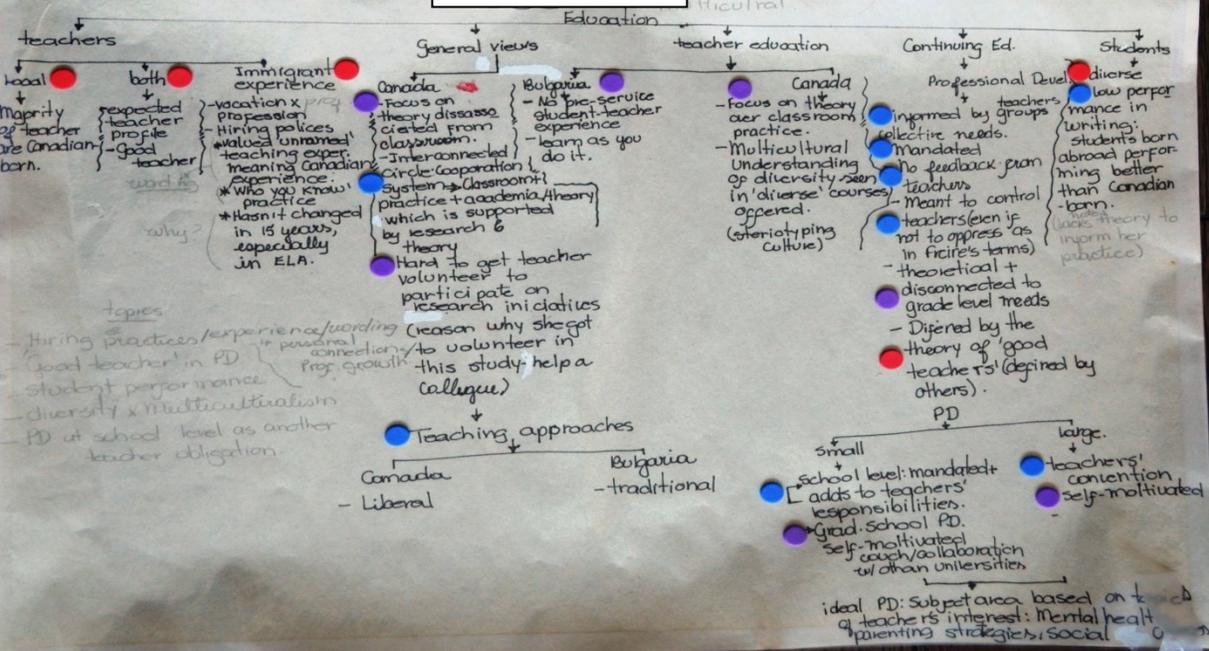
Anna



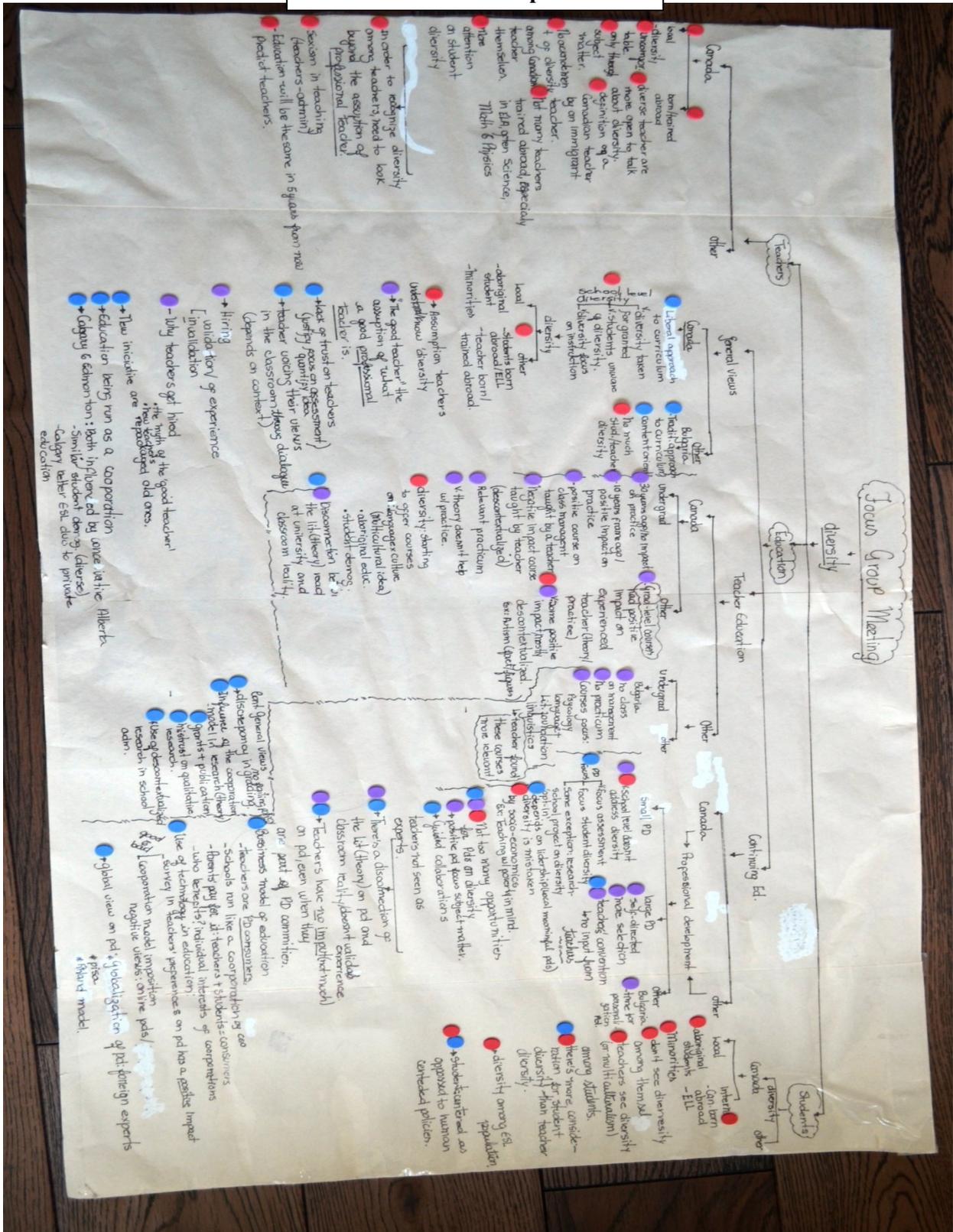
Jocelyn

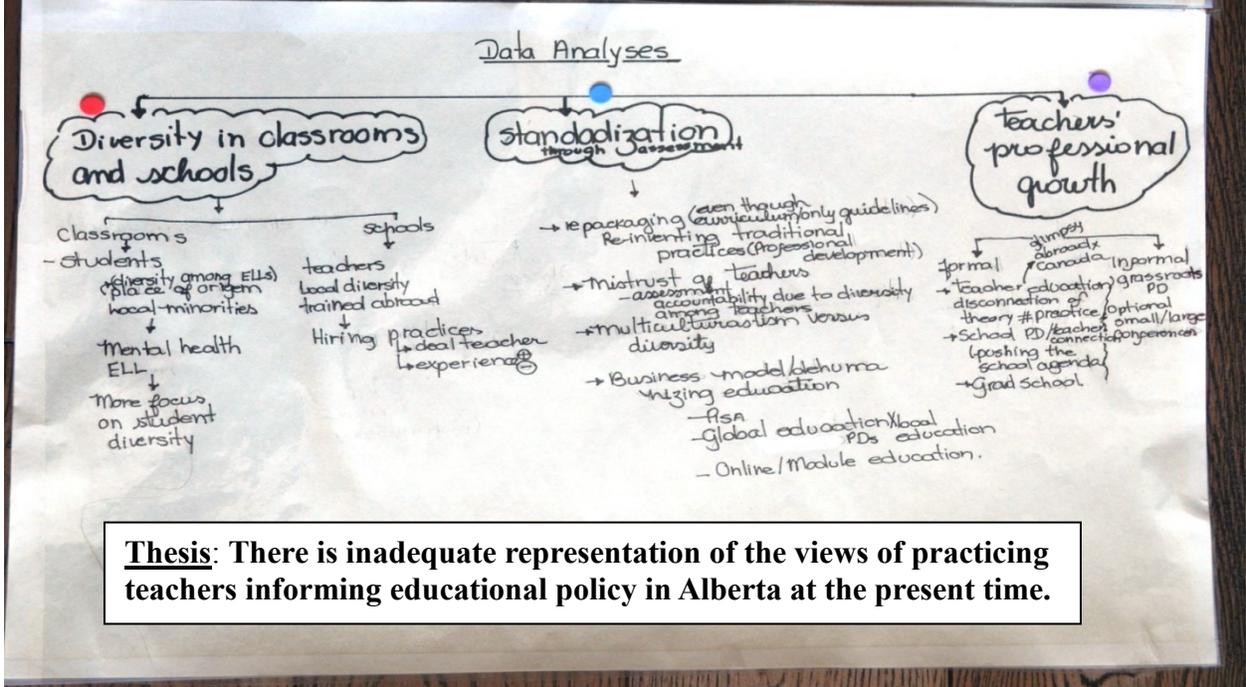
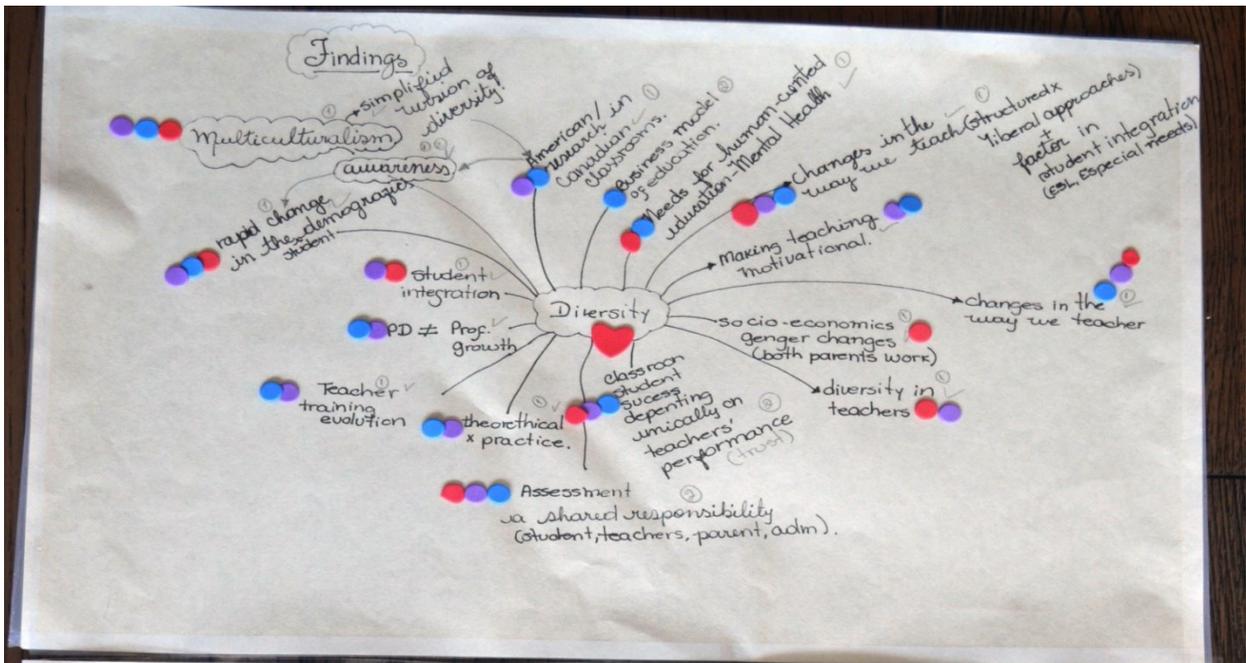


Maria



Focus Group





Thesis: There is inadequate representation of the views of practicing teachers informing educational policy in Alberta at the present time.